



# MINE IS THE KINGDOM

*By*  
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## FOREWORD

*AT a price, a man may gain the whole world. James Stuart achieved less, but the price was the same. He was a poet, a lover, a coward and a king, once or twice more happy, at other times more desolate, than almost any other creature. Only the time-scoured bones of his violent story are to be found in the history books, and I have unscrupulously plundered every available hoard of contemporary scandal, legend, rumour and hearsay in search of the man himself.*

*My chief sources have been contemporary memoirs such as those of Sir James Melville and Lord Herries, the Records of the Scottish Privy Council, the Exchequer Rolls, royal and commercial account books, the Inventories of Mary, Queen of Scots, and the correspondence of men and women at her Court and that of her son. As far as may be, I have been faithful to the letter of history, though now and then I have plunged on into darkness in search of its spirit. But when historical characters speak on great occasions, their actual words, where they have been recorded, are used. In great or lesser matters I have never used fiction where I could find more exciting facts. Even the escape which Helga Ingerstrom planned for her lover has its parallel in the historical incident which produced the ballad of Young Logie. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were not only characters in Hamlet: they were real noblemen at the Danish Court. The witches in Macbeth claimed powers singularly like those mentioned in the criminal records of Edinburgh and Aberdeen, and we know that two companies of English comedians from London played before the King at Holyrood in 1601. There is, as far as I have been able to discover, no reason why Shakespeare should*

*not have gone with them, and his vivid interest in Scottish affairs, from witch trials to local politics, to suggest that he did. At all events I have yielded to the temptation to presume it.*

*For the purposes of this book I have set aside the theory, now largely discredited, that James was the son, not of Mary Stuart, but of the Countess of Mar, substituted for the sake of the Succession when the Queen's baby died. James, admittedly, did not take much after his mother, but if he, marrying a Danish princess, could produce such a genuine Stuart as his unlucky son Charles, then he must himself have been a Stuart in essentials for the strain to survive.*

*In the interests of clarity I have somewhat telescoped the intolerable complexities of Scottish politics in the sixteenth century, while indicating their general trend, and for the same reason I have treated the broad Scots in which every one, even at Court, spoke in those days, as the foreign language it would now seem and translated it throughout into modern, rather than Elizabethan English.*

*All the quotations, prose or verse, ascribed to James, are taken from his authentic works, and are, apart from the modification of the Scots, unchanged. One difficulty had to be circumvented: untitled Scottish wives did not at that period take their husbands' surnames, but, since the tracking down of husbands and wives with different surnames would be extremely tiresome to the modern reader, I have dealt with this by using no more names than I could possibly help, which, with a character list of this length, is probably in itself an advantage.*

*No reader of this book will, I hope, be even aware of the amount of research which has gone to its making. But I should like to acknowledge here with gratitude the generous help given me by various experts and without which I should have been lost; especially to thank Miss Helen Simpson for the unique loan of sixteenth century editions of such books as the *Daemonology* and *Lusus Regius*; Sir Francis Grant, Lord Lyon King of Arms, for all his courteous guidance on points of*

*heraldry; Mr. Charles Williams, whose valuable time I have taken up in discussion; Miss A. R. Allan, County Librarian of Roxburghshire, who has been indefatigable in obtaining for me so many old and rare books; Mr. R. L. Atkinson, M.C., of the Record Office, for his help with State documents; the Royal Scottish Geographical Society for the loan of maps and documents, the authorities of the Scottish Central Library for Students and of the Edinburgh University Library for a formidable total of borrowed books, also the Trustees of the British Museum for allowing a rare sixteenth-century map of Edinburgh to be reproduced as end papers.*



*Part One*

THE PRISONER

*"I have been persecuted, not from my birth only, but even since four months before my birth."*

JAMES VI., *Basilikon Doron*.





## CHAPTER ONE

THE GREAT GLOBE was monstrous as a monk's belly. The boy who leant, chin on fists, against the counter of his father's booth watched the fantastic outlines of Old World and New swing under the merchant's careful hands. Between the bulks of the continents fretted the strange seas, peopled by the cartographer with denizens of his own fancy and popular superstition, so that Master Haliburton's blunt fingers rested now on the tumultuous coils of a sea-serpent, now on some winged monster poised on mid-ocean rocks.

The globe had come from Paris, and was a cunning novelty. Not long ago, murmured Master Haliburton, men had been burnt for so picturing the world in despite of the Church of Rome, which would have it the centre of the Universe, meekly encircled by a heaven of stars.

"Instead of which," he explained, "see." He set the globe spinning with a swift twist. "It is our world which turns, bringing night and darkness."

The boy's brows puckered, as he tried to recall some of the more recent sermons of the kirk. "But Heaven . . ." he began.

"Is all about us. We spin through the void, turning before the sun as a roast turns on a spit."

Young Walter Haliburton reached out a forefinger and set the globe on the move. "But if we all spin like a top on the causeway," he said slowly, "where is this Hell that the preachers talk so much of?"

Master Haliburton wound his fingers in his beard and smiled at his son.

"You must ask that question of Master Knox," he said. "Or of Master Brodie next time he visits us. This is no time for plain folk to risk their skins by explaining theology. Leave such questions to the ministers. What have they to do with the merchandise which must be bought and sold whether the world is as round as a child's ball or as flat as one of your mother's trenchers? Listen, son. Here, in the Low Countries, is the city of Antwerp, where my brothers have their warehouse which came to us through the diligence of the great-uncle Andrew whose name I bear. In due course it will be yours, since the uncles, my brothers, are as childless as they are rich. Antwerp is the true centre of our world, a fair, neat town of wide quays and crowded streets, busy like a beehive with merchants from the towns of Germany and Italy, from Denmark, France, England, Portugal and Spain, coming and going about their affairs. . . ."

Father and son's relationship was evident in the last clear light of the March afternoon, as they bent over the great globe. The merchant, with snuff brown outer coat shrugged round his shoulders over doublet and hose against the draughts of his flimsy booth, was stoutly made, but showed few signs, at forty, of the bulkiness of a man of sedentary habit. His features were fine and his square beard crisped into reddish curls, while his son's hair was colourless like silver sand and fell as smooth as water across his head. Both had a look of the north, as if, centuries back, some forebear had adventured out of Scandinavia to settle on the windy shores of the Firth of Forth. But where the merchant's eyes, set back under jutting brows, were keen, remote and grey, young Walter's were candidly blue, wide-spaced, below a smooth forehead across which a casual lock strayed. The boy's short blunt nose and well-formed chin promised endurance and constancy, but the wide sweet mouth curled easily into

forgetful laughter even while the strong hands clenched into fists at the first hint of a High School brawl.

He edged his thigh up on to the counter, for his elbows were beginning to ache from his weight. "What affairs?" he asked. "We learn nothing of this at school."

Master Haliburton snapped impatient fingers. "At school!" he declared. "What should you learn there but this Latin and logic that serves no man a hand's turn? Would I keep you there, a great lad of twelve and more use to me elsewhere if I were not a burges and obliged to send my son to cool his heels in idleness till he knows as much Latin as his masters?"

Young Walter grinned. "Then good-bye to Antwerp," he said in mock distress. "For they will hardly make a learned doctor out of me this side of judgment."

"I had guessed as much," admitted his father dryly. "Let us see, instead, if I can make a merchant. Here, then, is Antwerp. There, in the estuary, lie the ships which bring goods from every corner of the world and take back others in return. Other goods go overland; to the cities of Germany which take a great quantity of English cloths, jewels, spices, and drugs, and bring us silver and quicksilver, copper, glass, good wools from Hesse, saltpetre, and the white Rhine wines which are of fine flavour and harm neither head nor stomach." The merchant's voice took on the droning quality of one who reads from a well-worn book. But though he spoke by rote the boy listened with passion. The names of strange countries, fine stuffs or deep drugs had over him the power of an incantation.

"And what do we send from Scotland?" asked young Walter.

His father pursed his lips and shrugged. "Furs of a kind," he admitted. "Sheep and rabbit skins mostly, though it is true that we send them some fine peltry of

different little beasts besides. The marten skins from Scotland are the most beautiful of all, and greatly prized. We have some pearls, large, but not of such fine water as those which the Spaniards bring from the New World. Nor are even those as rare and perfect as the pearls out of the Orient by way of Portugal. They talk of gold from time to time in Scotland, scratching on Crawford Moor, but, bah—they waste their time in greed and dreams. Some cloth comes from Scotland also, with salt and a little of the coal which men begin to burn instead of peat or wood, making a foul smelling smoke and a fierce heat.”

“Many fine things come into Scotland too,” said Walter, fingering a roll of gay coloured stuff, which lay beside him on the counter, “and our living with them.”

“A bare enough living,” his father grunted. “If I were the eldest of four brothers and not the youngest I would not keep a beggarly booth on the windy heights of Edinburgh with the stuffs my brothers can best spare from their warehouse in the great street of Antwerp.”

“They call you the chief cloth merchant of the city,” said young Walter, shocked. “And your goods are sent continually to the Court. I have told them so at school. Twenty ells of taffetas for hangings were bespoken for Holyroodhouse a week past, besides the dozen ells of cloth of silver commanded by the Queen herself in February as her gift to the Lady Jane Gordon for her marriage to the Earl of Bothwell.”

“Who gave you leave to study my account books?” rumbled the merchant, not displeased by this enthusiasm. “But to call my stuffs the best in Edinburgh is but middling praise. Whereas in Antwerp or London or Venice——”

“Venice—Venice, they spoke of Venice at school. A

sea-kingdom with great riches——” Walter pushed at the globe and sent it round again.

“Here.” His father checked its whirl. “A great city, rich indeed. From Venice they bring spices out of Asia, drugs such as rhubarb, aloes and senna-leaves, with dragon’s blood, mithridate and other things against poison and the pest.”

“I have heard them talk in the streets of the temper of the swords of Milan,” said the boy, his forefinger wandering across the map of Italy. The merchant guided it with his own. “Here is Milan, from which we have excellent weapons. But save us, how the Italians haggle. Give me the German or the Englishman for my customers.”

“The *Englishman*?” Walter’s voice was hushed with horror.

Master Haliburton surveyed his son with amusement. “Why not?” he asked. “I like the English merchants. Shrewd men, they are, and cool, with an eye for the pick of a cargo and the nap of a cloth. If you are wise you will not let any ranting rascallions set you against the English.”

“But it is not fifty years since Flodden,” Walter said. “And less since they pulled the very Palace of Holyrood about our ears.”

His father nodded. “Aye, just so. But Holyroodhouse is built again. And no doubt it will be burnt again too, before they’ve finished with us. Yet six years ago the English helped us drive the French widow of Guise from the port of Leith. We do best when we are friendly with our neighbours. For me, trade comes first.”

“Before the Queen?”

Andrew Haliburton laughed at the consternation in his son’s face. “So you would make me talk treason, eh, would you?” he chuckled. “I wish the Queen no ill. No,

I thank God for her bonny face. I would not seek like Master Knox to furrow it with wisdom. Yet when all's said, neither the Queen nor her fortunes concern me very much."

His big hand fell heavily on the boy's thin shoulder. "Why so shocked, boy? That I leave the fine flourishes to the rabble in the train of my lords this and that? That I would cram on steel cap or leather jacket in defence of my merchandise like any good burgess of Edinburgh, but not for the brightest eyes in the world?"

Young Walter flushed and glowered, disconcerted by the irony in his father's shrewd, dispassionate glance.

"Eh, son?"

"How should I know?" muttered young Walter.

"How indeed?" agreed his father, bending again over the great globe.

A clatter on the cobbles outside the narrow booth went unheard, but presently the door swung back to admit a servant in a crimson coat at the sight of which Master Haliburton rubbed his hands. The young man in the doorway wasted no words in greeting, but tossed a paper down on the merchant's counter.

"By order of her Majesty's Master of the Household," he explained. Then, leaning back against the door-post, and folding his arms across his chest, he withdrew himself from contemplation of such unworthy surroundings until the goods ordered should be supplied.

Walter watched him, backing into a corner, agape at the sight of so much grandeur, while his father, unimpressed by the habitual bearing of a palace lackey, composedly unfolded the scrawled parchment and opened his great ledger to record the sale.

"Yes, yes," he nodded over the abrupt quill-strokes, "six ells of the fine taffetas of the six threads, as was supplied

to her Majesty a week since. In green, the same as for the hangings for the bedchamber. Also three ells of the same in velvet, for cushions in the supper-room. . . .”

He rose from the bench beside the still-spinning globe and padded towards the row of iron-banded chests which stood against the back wall, kneeling down to prod at the heavy lock with a key from the ring at his belt. The lid creaked back, from the shadowy depths of the chest came a breath of sandalwood and spice. Master Haliburton plunged his hands to the elbows in rolls of rich cloths and brocades.

“The Queen’s Majesty has a pretty eye for a colour,” he admitted, as he drew out a roll of leaf-green taffetas. “This is newly arrived at the port of Leith out of Venice. Also the velvet which comes from Toledo in Spain direct to her Majesty. Green, that favoured colour at her Court. . . .”

The lackey in the doorway raised a hand to emphasise rather than stifle a yawn.

Master Haliburton, his smile broadening, set the two rolls of fine stuff on the counter with a thud.

“My shears, Walter, if your eyes can still see them since they dwelt upon so much brilliance.”

The boy plunged for shears and measure-stick, flushing to the fair line of his hair, while the lackey, suspicious of mockery, glared resentfully at Master Haliburton, busy again with quill and inkhorn, his lips set in an ironic curve as he wrote with his customary flourishes on a blank page before him.

“Saturday, this 9th of March, 1566. . . . Six ells of fine taffetas of the six threads, as supplied to the Master of her Majesty’s Household this day, at thirty shillings the ell. . . . Also three ells of velvet . . . and cords for the same. . . .”

He let the quill lie between the pages and went to the



street door to call up the outside stair for one of his apprentices.

"Willy . . . I want ye. Come down or send me Rob."

There was no answer. The merchant shouted again, but without result. Then a woman's voice came sharply from the stairhead.

"What ails you, Andrew, crying there for Willy that's lying abed of a fever, and Rob away to the market to buy us food for the Sabbath?"

"I had forgotten," said Andrew Haliburton. He turned back into the booth, pulling at his beard, looking from the servant in the royal livery to his son in his school-boy's dress of russet cloth, with crumpled ruff and thread-bare elbows. He had no need to ask whether the lackey would consent to carry the bales of stuff back to Holyroodhouse. He had had sufficient dealings with the Palace to know that he might as well ask the King himself. It wanted but an hour of supper time, and his wife would undoubtedly lay her tongue about them both if he allowed the boy to be late. Yet there were six ells of taffetas and three of velvet to be conveyed to the Palace for the Queen's order. And when her Majesty went in need of anything, she must have it on the instant, as well he knew. Thoughtfully he weighed the displeasure of Mary, Queen of Scots, against that of Margaret, his wife, and decided, after some hesitation, that he must set the Queen's needs first.

"Walter."

"Sir?" The boy was beside him.

"Take these goods, when I have parcelled them, to the Palace, and look ye, return at once, or your mother will have something to say."

"I will, sir." There was both mischief and understanding in the boy's grin.

Andrew Haliburton gave him the parcel and dropped

a hand for an instant on the shoulder that twisted away from him in the boy's eagerness to be gone. He watched his son follow reverently in the footsteps of the lackey in the royal livery, who twitched his horse's reins from the lad who was holding them, scattered the little group of staring townspeople with a curse, and set off briskly down the High Street, past St. Giles and the glooming bulk of the Tolbooth prison, with Walter panting a little from excitement as he trotted by his stirrup, the hand that gripped the leather warm against the horse's flank.

The High Street was crowded, for it was Saturday, between five and six of the clock, and women jostled each other as they went about the business of bringing home food for the Sabbath which began at sundown. Men were working unwillingly to clear the great piles of refuse which mounded the street in front of every door, while the pigs which rootled there squeaked and scuttled at sharp blows from the scavengers back to the sties which housed them below the stone forestairs with their iron railings which gave entry to the first floor of each house.

Carts which had brought merchandise to the city and must be out of its bounds by sundown lurched towards the Netherbow, that arched gateway which divided the little city of Edinburgh from the wealthy and growing suburb of the Canongate which lay, with its terraced gardens and crow-stepped gables, on the downward slope towards the Palace.

At the royal servant's stirrup Walter went unchallenged, for the guard stood back at the sight of them, so that they passed quickly through the usual crowd of lounging soldiers, officers of the Royal Customs, whose business it was to check goods on their entry into the royal burgh, ragged followers of the northern lords with their dark glances and bare shanks, drovers with their beasts, and

countrypeople with their bundles, while the women, shawls about their heads, came out on the wooden galleries which jutted out from the first floors of the steeply gabled houses to lean their elbows on the rails and nod comfortably over their comments on the crowd below.

The Netherbow was an important looking gateway, but the city wall itself could scarcely be called an efficient fortification. Its corner turrets housed more rats than warlike equipment, these days, and the mortar had long since begun to spill and crumble out between the ill-matched stones. The capital of Scotland, in fact, looked chiefly to its natural position for defence. Tilted along the ridge which climbed from the Palace of Holyrood to the Castle on its escarping western cliff, the citizens counted the great, stagnant Nor' Loch, with its treacherous reedy margins, as a useful barrier to attack from that quarter. The castle dominated the western summit of the ridge, and for the rest, the tottering Flodden Wall looped round the backs of the two main streets. In default of any sort of adequate garrison the citizens must be prepared to take the protection of their premises upon themselves, and it was laid down by local law that each man should have weapons ready to hand as he worked, so that he might snatch them up, if need be, in defence of the city's peace.

Such weapons did not usually rust in idleness, and Walter, trotting over the cobbles, mired to the knees already with the mud of the potholes in the street, noticed the familiar signs of trouble as he ran. Men stood about in the entrances to the alleys off the Canongate where the great lords had their houses in completer privacy than those on the street front in which the wealthy merchants preferred to live. Groups lingered in gateways, fingering the swords at their belts, talking or waiting in silence.

Here was a different scene from the cheerful bustle of the High Street, with a tension and secrecy of which Walter was alertly aware as the loungers checked their murmurings at sight of the queen's coat. But the lackey himself seemed to notice nothing. He was used to the scuffling whispers of crowds, and he had been in the service of the ruling house long enough to despise all citizens for their gaping and glowering. He checked his horse only at the entrance of the Palace forecourt, and Walter, whose lungs felt red-hot and stretched to bursting after his laden, mile-long trot, took a couple of grateful gulps of the cool dim air, and shifted his burden to the other arm as the man rode round to the servants' quarters.

The great bulk of the Palace towered above him, its high windows already pringling with constellated candle-flames in the spring dusk. From the servants' buildings, huddled at the back of the second courtyard, in a medley of kitchens and bakeries, brew-houses, stables and store-houses, came long shafts of cheerful light, and the sound of many voices through open doors. Men at arms in the royal coat tramped in and out of the guard-rooms, jostling house-servants and grooms, shouting and swaggering, waiting for the summons to supper.

Walter followed his guide, who had dismounted in the courtyard. Once indoors, the great man seemed to lose something of his grandeur. Glory fell from him like a garment, leaving him shrunken as he went about his business in fear of his betters. A passage led past the roaring activity of the kitchens towards the shadowy depths, where torches, stuck into holders at the height of a man's head, tossed in the wind of the servants' continual passing. The lackey took the bundle from Walter's grasp, jerked a gesture of dismissal, and set off along this passage, presumably in search of the Master of the Gard robe.

Walter, his errand finished, blankly watched him go. He was reluctant to leave the palace so soon, and hung about the corridor, jostled by panting scullions, stripped to shirt and trunks, with greasy clouts twisted about their waists, who raced, shouting to each other, from pantry to ale-cellar, from kitchen to buttery. Walter edged forward, foot by foot, enchanted and staring at the furious activity in the first kitchen, where half a dozen dripping joints turned, sizzling noisily, smelling superbly, in front of the blazing logs, while the black-bearded, hairy-armed master cook pounded pastry at the central table, roared at the pale turnspits, caught one of his helpers a crack over the head for dropping a boat of gravy and sent the others scuttling to his orders, one to the spice-house for mint and saffron, another to the larder for a couple of trussed capons, a third to the bake-house for new bread for the Queen's meat.

As Walter stood staring, a servant tottered past with a pile of pewter dishes which reached to his chin, stumbled in the doorway and shot half a dozen of the topmost dishes to the ground with a clatter which brought a roar of rage from the exasperated Master of the Kitchen, while the horrified servant bent his knee and sent other plates flying as he groped for those which had bowled to Walter's feet.

"Stand up, idiot," roared the great man. "Shall we have the whole service for the upper table rolling about the floor? Pick them up, boy, and carry them to the hall."

Walter had already stooped for the nearest dish, and now, ducking and dodging, he went in chase of the rest, among the feet of cooks and scullions, gathering plates from under the trestles of pastry-tables and butchery boards, from dark corners and unexpected doorways, till the pile in his arms was nearly as high as the grumbling

servant's as he set off proudly after him along the passage. They turned at right angles, turned again, then, as the clamour of the kitchens died behind them, climbed a flight of steps into the service room, a narrow slip of a place, with its scrubbed trestle-tables, on which piles of plates, some silver, others pewter, were ranged beside the goblets, the great tankards and decanters of wine, the baskets of bread, the basins and ewers and napkins ready for washing the hands of the nobility after the meal.

The keepers of the silver and tin vessels were counting the piles of plates; the ushers, carvers and servers of the meat passed to and fro by the folding doors into the hall, through which Walter caught a glimpse of tapestries and candles, swords and shields hanging between narrow windows, and long trestle-tables, white damask spread over green velvet, set round the walls with forms ranged down one side.

The keeper counted the pewter plates and grunted dismissal. Walter dragged his feet reluctantly towards the door, and stepped with a backward look into the corridor, to collide violently with a boy of a little more than his own age who was sauntering past, his lips pursed in a whistle as he tossed his flat cap of crimson velvet into the air with one hand and caught it with the other.

Walter's unexpected lunge nearly sent the other boy off his feet. He staggered across the wide corridor, pulled up with a hand outstretched to steady himself on the thick stone wall, then came suddenly at Walter, head down, fists clenched, and silent. Walter, well used to such attacks, stepped quickly sideways, hit out twice and sprang back out of reach, while the other boy, astonished, stood shaking his head as if a wasp had stung it. But he came on again, hitting with more care, and shrewdly, so that Walter took a blow for every blow he contrived to give. This was a fight after his own heart: he forgot his

whereabouts, forgot the grandeur of the Queen's servants, thought only of the other boy's darkly tousled head and obstinate jaw, and the streak of blood across the plump cheek behind the defending fists.

He was drawing back his right arm for a thrust towards the ribs when a large hand gripped his collar, and a deep voice cursed the pair of them. Any further brawling, said a cool, amused voice, and they would be taken straightway to the Master of the Pages, who would no doubt flog them both.

Walter's assailant drew the back of his hand scross his nose and wiped it on the seat of his crimson velvet trunks. His face was meekly downcast.

"You hear?"

"Yes, my lord."

The tall man with the remote grey eyes and bitterly curving mouth turned on his heel and swaggered off, drawing on his elegant, scented gloves, his spurs ringing with every step, the shadows of the plumes of his hat wagging enormously on the wall, while the page bent his back to make an eloquent and vulgar gesture of derision. Then he turned to Walter, grinning amiably as he adjusted the ruffles at his neck and the white lawn sleeves of his crimson velvet doublet.

"I've you to thank for that. Who are you, anyway?"

Walter explained the errand which had brought him to the palace and the matter of the plates which had kept him there. "And now I had best go home," he said regretfully. "Unless . . ." He clenched his fists and edged towards the page, with a look of hope. But the older boy hastily shook his head.

"No, no," he said. "Last time the Master of the Pages set his birch about my bottom I could neither bow nor sit for a week."

"Outside, perhaps . . ." Walter suggested.

"Outside I would knock your head off," bragged the page, strutting prodigiously. "But I have my duties indoors. Therefore——"

He waved a hand in a gesture of abnegation. "I am to wait on the Queen's person after she has finished supper," he explained.

"The Queen," said Walter, awed. "I have never seen the Queen."

"I see her every day."

Walter's awe deepened.

"You could catch a glimpse of her, perhaps, if I liked to manage it."

"You could?"

"Of course. The Queen will take supper to-night in the little room on the far side of her bedchamber. The Countess of Argyle is with her, the secretary fellow, and——"

"How shall I know which is the Queen?" whispered Walter urgently, as they went together along stone corridors beneath the wagging torches, hurrying past occasional open doors within which men conferred.

"You will have no doubt of the Queen," said the page. "But hurry. There is the chamber of my Lord Lennox that is father to the King. Huntly and Bothwell are with him. And there goes my Lord Ruthven, who has been abed with a fever. He has a face like a ghost even now." And he pushed Walter quickly past the lighted doorway, so that he had only a glimpse of a group of men whispering, one whetting his blade on a stone he had taken from a pouch at his girdle, while the lips of the black-bearded Patrick Ruthven were drawn back from his teeth like those of a snarling dog as he thumbed his dagger-point.

Walter forgot Master Knox and the new religion as he hastily sketched a sign of the cross. The dark, vicious



face of the Earl of Ruthven sent a shiver down his spine. But the Queen's page shrugged. He had seen too many palace brawls, in his eighteen months of office, to concern himself with the doings of the great lords. "They may knock our heads together," he said reassuringly, "but they only sheathe their daggers in our betters. Mind your feet now. We are on the stairs that lead to the Queen's rooms. How your shoes creak."

Walter flushed deeply as he tried to quiet his thriftily patched shoes.

"Here is her ante-chamber: there is the alcove where she prays."

Walter stood staring, but with a tweak to his sleeve the page pushed forward. "Beyond is the bedchamber, beyond again the supper room, a curtain drawn across the doorway against the draught as usual. But I have pinched a hole or two in time past. That will be easy."

They moved on, Walter clumping cautiously across the carpets which the Queen had bought from his father to spread on the floors, though lesser housewives hung them upon the walls instead, so that the passage of feet should not spoil them. It was strange, Walter thought, to move so silently, without the usual rustle and swish of feet among the straw. Strange, too, to see again the green carpet which had come up to the shop from the port of Leith only a few weeks past. He could distinguish the very pattern of dragons and flowers which he had traced with a forefinger. An embroidery frame stood near the hearth with a tumble of bright silks beside it.

By the frame was a stool with a green velvet cushion, gold-corded, and a squat leather-bound book lay upon it, face downwards, beside a box of comfits.

"She cannot abide sad colours," said the page. "She's wonderful young for a Queen."

Then, pleased at his companion's bemused stare, which

included him among these marvels, he strolled across the room to the doorway, and lifted the heavy curtain which hid the bedchamber. From the little supper room beyond came the murmur of companionable voices, the occasional chime of glass, soft laughter, muffled by the heavy curtain of green and gold velvet.

The two boys stood as still as the candle-flames which burned so steadily in their sconces, sending long shadows down the woven figures of nymphs and garlands that danced across the Flemish tapestry. The page was about to let the hangings fall behind them when a sudden scream tore through the quiet from the room beyond. A chair went over with a crash, a man cursed, the velvet curtain bulged and shook as combatants struggled behind it. The sound of breaking glass rose against a woman's shrieks, the pounding of hasty feet, and the terrified sobbing of a man who pleaded, in English and Italian, for mercy.

"For the love of Jesu . . . have pity . . . have pity. . . . Madam, Madam . . . ah . . . *God*. . . ."

The babbling rose to a scream of sheer agony, and the page wrenched Walter back into the shadows of the ante-chamber just as the curtain to the supper-room came rattling down. Several men stumbled through, bearing another who still shrieked as their daggers searched through silk and velvet for the unwilling flesh. At last the shrieks stopped and they let the limp body of David Rizzio drop at the head of the stairs, peered down at it, stirred it with their feet, then slid past it and away. All except a tall, black-bearded man who staggered against the wall, a hand to his side, his face working and paper-white. Afterwards he lurched back through the bed-chamber, breathing jerkily and calling out for wine.

The two boys, too terrified to stir, heard his unsteady laughter as he surveyed the chaos, then a woman's voice,

harsh with grief, helplessly broken with rage, "Before God, my lord Ruthven," cried the Queen of Scotland, "I bear that in my belly which will one day avenge these cruelties and affronts."

"Indeed, Madam?" Ruthven's voice was amused. Strength had come back to him, ill as he was, with the wine he drank.

"Sorcerer, murderer . . . this son of mine shall be the ruin of you and your house. . . ."

As the tall man laughed again Walter broke free and ran, sobbing. He fled past the huddle of tattered velvet from which the blood soaked darkly through the familiar carpet to the boards below, and down the shallow stairs, turning right and left at random till before him a door opened into the quiet darkness of an empty courtyard, where he stood still at last, shaky and sick, leaning his forehead against the cool indifferent stone, his stomach heaving within him, his knuckles pressed vainly against his eyes.

## CHAPTER TWO

THREE MONTHS HAD PASSED since Walter's visit to Holyroodhouse. He had gone about white-faced and silent for a week after it, till his mother dosed him thoroughly, as she did everything, for a disordered digestion. But it was long before the dream of Patrick Ruthven's pain-blenced face and the Queen's threats quite left him, for the Earl of Ruthven had been exiled, with the others, for that night's work. And already he was dead. Summer lay on Edinburgh, the schools were on holiday, and Walter left the last traces of his experience behind him as he roamed the countryside.

It was nearly noon, and at home his mother was watching the two apprentices lift the board on to its trestles ready for the midday meal. Their clumsy, scuffling movements set her fingers itching to take the thing from them and put it to rights herself. Such a work they made of it! She flapped the cloth indignantly over the board when at last it was laid, smoothing the creases and settling the folds with the rapid tweaks of the experienced housewife as she sent the two lads packing, one to the peat-stack for more fuel, the other down the forestair to warn her husband that dinner was waiting.

It was not, nor would be for another ten minutes, but fourteen years of married life had enabled her to gauge the exact, inevitable interval between her cry of dinner on the table and the laggard sound of the merchant's footsteps up the outside stair from his booth, that lightly built shanty which edged out into the Lawnmarket from the angle under the forestair.

The door which gave on to it stood ajar, and the wooden shutters, which closed the lower half of the narrow window instead of glass in foul weather, were pushed right back along their grooves, so that the June sunlight streamed across the room in broad bands where the dust-motes whirled in the wake of the housewife's lively progress from one side of the room to the other, as she banged the wooden trenchers down on the board, bustled to the vessel aumry for spoons and napkins, to the meat aumry for bread, to the fireplace to stir and sip at the stew.

The room in which she worked was better furnished than many of its time, for Master Haliburton had a habit of bringing upstairs any novelty which took his fancy and had not found a quick sale. There was even a keeking-glass, or wall-mirror, elaborately mounted in a silver frame, which had come from Germany and been damaged in transit. This mirror gave the Haliburton household considerable standing with the neighbours, who had only heard of such things in the great houses of the gentry.

But the merchant's wife had even less time than usual to give to her surroundings, for her husband had sent up word that Master Brodie would be taking his dinner with them, and Master Brodie, decent man, had usually more appetite than meat to satisfy it with. So a nice young rabbit had had to be bought at the last minute from the poultry wife on the steps of the Mercat Cross to enrich the stew.

She swung the pot away from the glowing peat as the two men came up the steps. "Come away in, Master Brodie," she said. "And have they given you a parish yet?"

"Not yet," said Master Brodie.

"Tuts, that's bad," said the merchant's wife, ladling

busily. "But surely provision for all the ministers will have to be made? They must have fire and food as well as leave to preach the Gospel."

The minister took his eyes from the savoury steam of the stew with an effort. Things had indeed come to a pretty pass when a man's empty stomach came between him and his thoughts of God.

"Provision is to be made," he agreed. "But not, perhaps, till the lords have shared the estates of the Popish religious houses to their satisfaction."

"And what has Master Knox to say to the destitution of his preachers?"

The minister spread out his hands and brought them together with a little gesture of helplessness.

"Well, wife, I see no reason to wait longer," broke in Andrew Haliburton. "If the boy is late he can go without his meat. Draw up, draw up now, Master Brodie, and ask the blessing for us."

The meal was half over when Walter came up the stairs, a brace of wild duck in his hand, singing one of the tunes of the time cheerfully to himself in a voice that wavered occasionally from a treble to a grunt.

*"The Pope, that pagan full of pride  
He has us blinded lang,  
For where the blind the blind does guide . . ."*

Here he kicked the door at the head of the stairs open and came into the room, still singing:

*"No wonder they go wrang. . . .* Look, Mother, what I got on the far side of the Nor' Loch with nothing but a stone and a sling."

"A David, a David," murmured Master Brodie, stuffing a gobbet of bread dipped in gravy into his mouth and looking admiringly at the ducks.

"Put them away and come and greet Master Brodie," rumbled the merchant.

Reluctantly Walter laid the ducks down in a corner before climbing over the wooden form to his place beside the minister, now industriously polishing his trencher with his last crust of bread.

"So they still sing that song, do they?" said Master Brodie.

"Surely." Walter broke a round of bread into his trencher and unfastened the knife from the sheath at his belt. "We all sing it at the school. There's a fine swing to it."

"There's more than a swing to it. Aye, Andrew Hali-burton, I mind well the first time ever I heard yon song that helped bring in the Reformation of the Kirk. I was working in the field," said Master Brodie, "on just such another summer's day." He waved a thin hand towards the open door at the stair-head beyond which the still sunlight of June lay on the tall grey house-fronts. From below came the strident voices of hawkers. "*Wha'll buy sour milk . . . wha'll buy . . . ?*" Indoors, the merchant's wife had chased the apprentices back to their work and begun to clear the board.

"The word went round," said Master Brodie, "that the pedlar body was at the farm. So every bairn dropped what he had hold of and ran for the house, with our elders following. There he was, just like any other eident body, with his stuff laid out on the doorstep, and himself sitting on a upturned quern, singing yon song through his nose, like a bumble bee in the heather. But we listened and we laughed, and my father bought twa-three of the ballad-sheets for the price of a meal with the farm-hands. Before the end of it he had them learned that tune and started on another. And on he went down the valley."

"Did he come back?" asked Walter.

Master Brodie shook his head. "Not him, but many like him. Mind ye, I'm talking of fifty years syne, when Chapman and Millar were the only folk with a printing-press in the city of Edinburgh and scarce a body but the priests and the dominies could read Latin or Scots. But they could all sing, aye, and they did. The folk at the back of us—we hardly kenned their whereabouts, much less their names—put everything they could lay hands on into metre so that it was easily minded. The Psalms were first put into Scots metre instead of the Latin then, aye, and the Lord's Prayer and the Creed."

"And the priests," said Walter, "didn't they care?"

"Not till latterly," said Master Brodie. "They'd been used with folk singing, and what did it matter to them what they sang? But we'd great men working for us, though it was as much as a body's life was worth for it to be known. Many's the castle, aye and the farm-house I've gone to in the mirk night when the master roused his household to listen to the Word of God whispered over a dead fire by the light of a candle and in fear of our lives. And the books we got over from Paris and Geneva were enough to send a man to the faggots on Castle Hill. But they were gotten in, despite them. Many's the one you've had tucked away in your fine velvets, Andrew."

"Me? Never a one," said the merchant, smiling into his beard.

"What? Not Tyndale's New Testament in the crimson brocade that was searched with swords on the quayside of Leith? And a dozen of Luther's books in the palms of as many French gloves for the Court?"

"I cannot call it to mind," said Andrew Haliburton. "When you're a merchant, Matthew, yon things are best not minded, ye ken. Who's to know even now what airt the wind's like to blaw from next, Catholic or



Protestant, and am I to lose my licence to trade as a burghess of Edinburgh for the sake of a wheen Bibles and French gloves that's worn dune twenty-five years past?"

Master Brodie smiled. "Good, kind friend," he said. "Forget if you like, but I cannot."

"If you sit longer about the board," cried the merchant's wife from the inner chamber, "you must take it down yourselves. I cannot be doing with a cluttered room left all the afternoon."

"We'll move the board later, wife," said the merchant. "Talk away, Matthew, there's the boy with his eyes round in his head for news of the old days."

And Master Brodie, contentedly tilting a newly-filled tankard, talked on of the desperate time when the Catholic Kirk in Scotland first realised that the men working underground like so many moles against them had undermined their authority till its very foundation tottered. He spoke of the first Protestant martyr, Patrick Hamilton, of the black-bearded George Wishart, tramping through the country with his disciple, John Knox, carrying a two-handed sword drawn before him as he went.

"But why did they not burn Master Knox too?" asked Walter.

"Master Knox," remarked the merchant dryly, "was not there to be burnt when the fires were brightest. Better a live preacher than a dead one, Walter, for there's plenty folk would burn as well as John Knox but few that could preach his sermons."

Master Brodie, however, had detected an ironic gleam in his friend's eyes, and his own were angry as he spoke sharply, "I'll hear no words against John Knox, even from you, Andrew."

Andrew Haliburton stroked his crisp sandy beard with gentle fingers. "You need have no fear of my tongue,

Matthew, surely, after all that's passed between us in the matter of—French gloves.”

But the minister was not to be so easily appeased.

“It does not matter who speaks, if he speaks against a man of God.”

The merchant continued to smile as he surveyed the fanatical little figure of his guest, who had half risen from his bench, his fingers gripping the board's edge.

“Sit you down, sit you down, Matthew,” said Master Haliburton soothingly. “I said nothing against the preacher. May he not be a man of God and careful of his own skin?”

“*You* should know that,” flared Master Brodie, “since you thought it safer to forget the French gloves.”

“Certainly I do,” said his host, unruffled. “And I think no worse of any man for doing likewise. Had Master Knox faced the faggots instead of setting up house in Geneva we should be short of a preacher to ding down the pulpit in St. Giles for us on the Sabbath. No, no, Matthew, some men serve with their swords and others with their eloquence. Let each choose his own weapon.”

“The sword of the Lord,” declaimed Master Brodie, “has arisen and slain His enemies. His faithful people are now busy about the building of His Kirk. Woe upon them that hinder, Andrew Haliburton, for they shall not be suffered to remain, stumbling-blocks for the servants of the true faith.”

“Eh, Matthew, Matthew,” said the merchant tolerantly, “would you raise the stakes on the Castle Hill again and pile the faggots round your old friends? Have the Papists not lit torches enough and to spare?”

“I serve the Lord and the Protestant faith, not my friends,” said the minister harshly.

“The Lord will not grudge you your friends, Matthew,” said the merchant.

"The Kirk will have no mercy on backsliders, Andrew Haliburton. It must purge itself of all dross and worthlessness, to appear meekly before God, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing."

"Ihmhm," said Andrew Haliburton.

Master Brodie rose with violence, almost unseating Walter as the bench lurched back. He stood up, fierce and straight, gathering his shabby gown about him. "I warn you," he declared, "against the dangers of levity, of indifference, of worldly ambition. All men are equal before God, and if a man that is my friend is also a sinner it is as a sinner that he will be brought before the Kirk."

Andrew Haliburton looked him over with interest, sitting still in his high, upholstered chair from Spain, his hands lying easily on the smooth leather, and one knee cocked over the other. His face was calm, even amused.

"How soon a man may turn from the leveret in his hole to the hound baying outside of it," he said. "Strange, Matthew, to think you would show me little more consideration than the beast in the hole if you had the chance of catching me there."

The fanatical expression began to fade from Matthew Brodie's slightly protuberant round brown eyes. He made a half-shamefaced gesture as he stepped over the bench and picked up his flat black cap from the settle.

"Here is no question of holes and leverets," he said. "We are members of the same Kirk, and so one of another. . . . You need not be afraid."

"I am not afraid," said Andrew Haliburton dispassionately.

"And why must ye glare at me then, as if I were a bogle?"

The merchant threw up his hands as if unable to find words of explanation, then brought them heavily down

again on the leather arms of his chair. He had opened his mouth to reply when a sudden thunderous crash, which seemed to come from almost over their heads, struck him to silence.

"Mercy on us," said his wife from the farther room where she was sorting linen. "What in the world's that?"

"The guns from the Castle," said her husband.

"Heaven save us." She hurried across the room with all the apprehension of a woman born and bred in a city continually affronted by every extremity of national and civil war. "Will they never let quiet folk have any peace?"

They were all soon at the stair-head, except Andrew Haliburton, who sat on in his chair at the head of the board, philosophically awaiting whatever news might come.

Up and down the street women were already clustered at the other stair-heads, called from washing up the dinner, spoons and platters still in their hands. Below them men jostled each other between the double line of busy, tottering booths, jerry-built in front of the old tall houses.

"What's amiss ?" the merchant's wife called down to the crowd.

A man shouldering his way past looked up with a grin as another shattering volley broke over their heads. He jerked his head towards the battlements which bulked so blackly against the summer sky. "Naught's amiss. Your gudeman can keep his whinger to stir his parritch, mistress. It's a bairn at the Castle, this time, not soldiers at the yett."

"The Queen's bairn that's looked for?" cried the merchant's wife, wiping greasy fingers on a cloth.

"And are they like to waste their powder on any ither body's?" shrieked the stout woman with the bare arms

and the tucked-up kirtle who was leaning far out over a frail wooden gallery on the first floor of an adjoining house. "Mebbe I'd best send word to the Castle the next time I'm brought to bed."

The suggestion was taken up and improved by various ribald citizens in the street below, while the stout woman folded her arms across the good grey stuff which covered her ample stomach and opened an almost toothless mouth in a roar of Rabelasian good humour.

"I've still to hear that they're better than ither folk up yonder," she declared. "For all their fuss and fancy. Oh, aye, I've seen Master Haliburton down below getting in the cushions and the carpets, the cloths of gold and dear knows what besides to welcome the Queen's by-blow. It's just what she can lay hands on for Bessie o' Fishwife's Wynd's bairns, but it's silks and velvets for the son of Signor Davie."

"Tuts, Bessie," said Master Brodie, shaking his head at her, "that's real wicked talk."

But the crowd below greeted the witticism with uproarious laughter, and went on their way, milling up and down the noisy streets, carrying the new saying with them, up to the West Port where the cattle bellowed as the fleshers wrangled over their prices, down the Grass-market to the Cowgate where the countrymen offered their hay and straw, up and down the High Street where the dealers of fish chuckled as they slapped their wares down on scale-coated boards. The salt sellers sniggered in Niddry's Wynd, and passed it on to the stalls of the chapmen huddled from the Tolbooth to the Tron. The chapmen shouted it across to the hatmakers and skinners who displayed their goods across the way, and customers carried it to the shoemakers of Forrester's Wynd, to the country people who gathered about the Butter Tron at the head of the West Bow where their goods were weighed

and examined by the town's officials; and the officials themselves paused to grin as they slung the weights on to the pan and set the great beam of the Tron tilting. "The son of Signor Davie." That was good. David Rizzio might lie dead and buried, his life let out by fifty wounds, but his name flashed from citizen to citizen on that summer's morning, while the gunners on the battlements toiled over the clumsy cannon, and the bell of St. Giles clamoured over the sceptical city.

In the merchant's house Andrew Haliburton smiled and shrugged at the gossip while the minister lingered to discuss the great event which had made him forget the words he had had with his host.

"This'll be a great day at the Castle," said Andrew Haliburton placidly. Times of rejoicing were good for business and he anticipated many profitable orders in connection with the christening ceremonies to come.

Master Brodie wagged his head doubtfully. "Maybe," he said, "but whether it's to be a great day for Scotland remains to be seen."

"An heir to the throne, a steady government again; surely these things cannot but be good for the country's trade," murmured the merchant.

"I was thinking of her Kirk, Andrew," said the minister portentously. "It is open to doubt whether this son of a Popish princess can bring any blessing to the Reformed Kirk."

"Oh, come now, Matthew, that's to condemn the bairn before he's fairly settled in his cradle, much less on his throne. Give him time, man, give him time."

"I trust he will give us peace," said the merchant's wife, bustling into the room with a pile of clean dishes for the vessel aumry. "I am sick and weary of this clash and wrangle."

"Indeed, mistress, and so are we all," said the minister.

"Aweel, I'd best be stepping." He took his leave and went cautiously down the steps, for Edinburgh fore-stairs were steep and unkind to middle-aged bones.

Up in the Castle the usual order of affairs was set at nothing. Orders were given and contradicted, horses saddled for the messengers who were to carry the news of the Prince's birth to all the royal burghs in the kingdom. Horsemen with letters for Perth and Dundee and Stirling, eager to be the first with the news, eyed each other and cursed as they waited. In the royal apartments representatives of the nobility and the Kirk cooled their heels and gossiped in the ante-chamber next to the tiny room in which the Queen lay, while the newly appointed members of the infant Prince's household hurried to and fro under the direction of his governess, the black-browed, grim-faced Countess of Mar. She looked them over with pursed lips; the head nurse and the four women under her, five ladies of gentle birth, rockers of his cradle. A master cook was in waiting with his underlings, with servants for the Prince's ale-cellar and his wine-cellar, his pantry and his chamber, a furnisher of coals, a confectioner for his kitchen, and five musicians for his hall.

But the centre of the sensation was unaware either of his grandeur or of the chuckles of the common people in his elaborate cradle, while his mother's russet hair still clung damply round her pale, pointed face as she lay quiet under the weight of gold-stitched brocade and watched the great lords creep in, tiptoeing across the tiny room so that their spurs should not ring on the floor as they bent keen bearded faces over the froglike creature in his rich cocoon. The Lord John Erskine, Earl of Mar and Captain of the Castle, loyal servant and unassuming gentleman; the Lord James Stewart, Earl of Moray and half-brother to the Queen, ambitious, vain and gifted;

the territorial lords led by Atholl and Argyle, went softly in and out, for there was only room for a few to pass each other in that tiny angular room high on the rock. The lords stood round in the doorway, the ladies fidgeted beside the bed, Mary waited with her eyes closed. When she opened them, the awkward, tall figure of the young Earl of Darnley was standing by the cradle. Mary frowned, then forced herself to smile at her husband.

"My lord," she said.

The sound of her voice swung the young man round towards the bed. He dropped on one knee, and took her hand with a shamefaced, fumbling gesture of his long fingers.

Mary said steadily, "God has given you and me a son, begotten by none but you." She had raised her voice so that, in the utter silence, it carried to the watchful group in the doorway and out into the crowded audience chamber beyond.

"I protest to God, and as I shall answer at the great day of judgment, this is your son and no other man's."

Darnley's fingers tightened a little round her own. He made a movement as if he would rise to kiss her, and she turned her head away, withdrawing her hand. "For he is so much your son," she added in a lower tone, "that I fear it will be the worse for him hereafter."

In the cradle the infant Prince began to scream, so that the attention of the ladies was distracted with little futilities of hushing and rocking which the crimson-faced scrap treated with contempt, as he bawled for the warm and cushioning comfort of his wet-nurse's breast, denied him too long by reason of the illustrious company.

Mary smiled. "And this," she said, "is the Prince who shall, I hope, first unite the two kingdoms of Scotland and England. At least it seems he can make his wishes known."



The heavy lids dropped over her dark and deeply shadowed eyes. The vitality which was its charm ebbed out of that fabled face. It was more like a death mask in ivory than the face of a living woman as she lay there. She was, after all, not yet twenty-five. She had carried her son in fear and given him birth in agony. She had been threatened and defied. Her mind began to dwell on the pain from which she had just escaped, pain which she feverishly identified with the sharply thrusting points which had menaced her and murdered her Italian secretary four months before, at Holyrood. Her face crumpled childishly and she began to whimper. One man had threatened her with a pistol across the supper table. She sweated at the memory.

"What if it had shot?..." Her eyes opened, turned wildly towards the cradle. "What would have become of him and me both?"

"Madam," said Darnley anxiously, "these things are all past."

She looked at him indifferently, dismissing both him and the past of which he spoke with a little finger-tip gesture of utter weariness. "Then let them go," she whispered, turning her head on her pillows, restlessly seeking sleep in which fear and pain might be forgotten. Her arched brows were drawn together with a furrow between as if, half waking, she knew herself to be only delivered from the torments of reality into the terror of dreams.

The great men, the ladies-in-waiting, the courtiers, creaked cautiously out. Darnley swaggered past the murmuring groups in the audience chamber, a slight flush on his cheek-bones and a self-conscious smirk on his petulant, girlishly red lips. Presently the little room was left to the mother and child, save for the wet-nurse, who had come in on the heels of the last out-going noble,

and the lady-in-waiting seated beside the bed, the beads of her scented rosary clicking steadily through her practised fingers. A log dropped, sending up a scatter of sparks, and the lady-in-waiting signed to the page in the doorway to send a serving-man to replenish the fire, for even at high summer the chill of the Castle rock and the great walls struck at the bones. In her great bed the Queen drowsed uneasily, while the new Prince prodded contentedly at the comforting nipple, and Sir James Melville set his spurs to his horse's sides as he galloped along the road to Berwick, with despatches for Queen Elizabeth in her palace by the English riverside.

### CHAPTER THREE

THE WHOLE COUNTRY lay basking under a cloudless summer sky. On the hills north of the Border hawthorn blossom still weighed the branches like snow, while the last of the bluebells still stood knee-high in the steep woods. Beyond the fortress of Berwick the first of the bell-heather stained the moors and the wanton, flaunting poppies blazed among the corn on the plain of York. South again towards London, along that rutted track by courtesy called high road, the dust billowed up behind every cavalcade, hovering in the warm air before settling softly over the wayside orchards where the apple blossom had set.

The horsemen who galloped towards London were grey as ghosts with it, as were their horses, except where darker clots showed the marks of urgent spurs. Sir James Melville, with his letter to her English Majesty, had left Edinburgh Castle at noon, four days before. As he followed the windings of the track between vagrant bushes where the innocent pink and white saucers of the wild roses hung among the butterflies, he had hopes of reaching London before night. His horse checked at a rise: he let the reins fall on the slavered neck and the animal picked its way to the summit, then stood, head down, nostrils yearning towards the sweet short turf which bordered the narrow road. James Melville, rocking a little from the weariness of four long days in the saddle, shielded his eyes from the westering sun and peered into the horizon haze through which came the fretted shine of that river of his hopes, the sluggish Thames between

her mud-banks, spanned by one single, towering bridge, and bristling with busy craft.

Sir James swung himself to the ground and inspected his dejected horse, running an experienced hand over fetlocks and hocks, rubbing the friendly muzzle which nudged round at him as he stooped. His servants, who were dour and practical men, sat their horses without moving. It did not occur to them to inspect their beasts. The master provided them with horses as he supplied them with their liveries and weapons. If either were worn out in his service, they would be replaced. So with their horses. They sat squarely in their saddles, their steel-blue eyes screwed up beneath sandy brows as they peered at the fabulous city of London and wondered whether the wenches there were more forthcoming than the fishwife lasses of the windy wynds of Edinburgh. The youngest man-at-arms leaned down to pluck a sunny sprig of gorse and tuck it into the band of his cap. It was not every man who rode to London on a summer's day. It would not be his fault if he had not some fine stories to tell them in Leith when he got home. He took his fingers, pricked by the long, secret thorns, reluctantly from his mouth as the cavalcade moved on.

The Court was at Greenwich. So said Sir James's brother Robert, Scottish Ambassador in London, who received him at his lodging with affection but demanded haste.

"I'll have wine sent to your room while you change your clothes. Hurry, man, hurry."

Sir James hurried, grumbling a little, because he was a soldier who had seen many campaigns and had little taste for the finicking ways of a foreign Court that set more store, as every one knew, by the turn of a phrase or the set of a ruff than by a man's devotion to his affairs. An uneasy place. He kicked his heavy boots aside, stripped

off his dusty riding-clothes and reached for the plum-coloured velvet trunks with the foppery of stuffing and slashing in the mode of the moment. Outside the casement the sharp, twanging English voices sounded strange after the soft-edged hubbub of the north. Men from a ship newly arrived from the Indies were wrangling over a choice of taverns, street vendors screamed against each other of mussels and water-cresses and summer strawberries, and over the cobbles came the tramp of a detachment of men-at-arms, on their way to the Tower.

The elder Melville appeared in the doorway, a discreetly gorgeous courtier in black and gold, his flat cap aslant on his iron-grey head.

"I left you out a pair of silken shanks," he said.

Sir James looked down on his sober hose. "Tuts, man, but these are fine enough. It is not the first time I have been to Court."

"You cannot go before the Queen in woven hose. It would be enough to damn us for a twelvemonth. She would take it as an affront. There lie the others. Put them on and let us go. The Secretary Cecil is not fond of those who keep him waiting."

"The Secretary!" Sir James was put out, and spoke discontentedly as he changed his hose. "Does he still rule England?"

"They still say so," admitted Sir Robert. "It is as true as it ever was, which is to say that it is still nonsense. The Queen's ministers seem, I've noticed, to have the most power when something is to be done against which there will be an outcry. They will urge her own decisions on her Majesty. And she will yield, and sigh. And afterwards she will look out over her fan, or lift those long hands of hers to Heaven. 'My Lords, what could I do?'"

Sir James chuckled, then grew grave as he reached for his cloak. "It is perhaps a better way to rule than to take

the power of divinity upon a single pair of shoulders, to give commands which have been whispered now by one false tongue, now by another."

Sir Robert's face was sad. "I fear, alas, it may prove so. But come, now, for pity's sake come."

They were ushered into the presence of a tall, slow-moving, austere dignified man in the late forties, at work upon State papers. Sir William Cecil—he was not yet Lord Burleigh—was seated at a broad table, covered with documents which curled here and there, weighted by their broken seals. For several minutes his quill creaked on, the only sound in the great room save for the remoter lap and splash of the grey tide on the steps across the garden.

When at last he received their news they could not tell how it moved him. The great statesman's face was blank as he murmured congratulations, expressed concern for the Scottish Queen's condition, asked if they had supped. James Melville had the impression of intense activity subtly masked, of a wary brain already weighing every new possibility, checking its advantages, for himself and for England, inspecting the dangers, all in the time it took him to sand his own signature on the parchment beneath his hands.

His boat, he explained, was waiting by the stair. They would do him the honour of sharing his supper before they set out? No formality, merely a young fowl, simply served, and a glass of wine on which he would welcome a second opinion.

He led the way to a panelled supper parlour.

"We have come in haste, Sir William," said Sir James bluntly.

The great man turned with his deliberate smile. "Ah, Sir Robert, your brother is just such another as yourself, single-hearted and hard-headed. Your Queen is fortunate

in her servants. They need not set a hand upon their heart: we know how true it beats, though it is not worn upon the sleeve."

"It is likely to do truer service in the breast, Mr. Secretary," said Sir Robert, unruffled. "I take it that you do not consider this the moment to offer our news to the Queen?"

"Good news," said Cecil, as he seated himself at the head of his dining-table and nodded to the servants by the wall, "will keep. It is the bad news that flies fast enough to pierce a man's brain. Tell me, Sir Robert, how does the wine seem?"

The elder Melville raised the fine glass and held it in front of the peaked flame of one of the candles, screwing his eyes half shut as he considered it, before raising the rim to his nose. He drew in a cautious breath or two, inhaling the bouquet deep into his lungs, then, finally pouting his thin lips to the brim, he tilted the sunny liquid towards him and sparingly sipped. Setting the glass carefully down at last, he nodded.

"It is a pretty wine, Mr. Secretary, a very pretty wine, and taken at the moment of its perfection."

Their host lifted his own glass towards him, bowed and drank. "A most considered judgment, Sir Robert. And Sir James?"

"An excellent wine," said Sir James uneasily, as he watched the servants carve the fowl and afterwards bring sweetmeats and fruits and finicking little plates for what the Secretary called dessert, in the French manner, and apologised for offering them at the dining-table, not in the farther room.

"But time passes," said Cecil, helping himself to grapes grown on his own estate, and glancing mischievously at James Melville as he added, "or so Sir James would remind me."

"Had I not thought so, I might have spared my horse on the way from Scotland," said Sir James.

The Secretary rose. "We will go," he decided. "With the tide in our favour we should drop down to Greenwich well enough. You have your cloaks? The wind will strike cold at sunset."

They were soon settled under the scarlet canopy which matched the coats of the royal boatmen, emblazoned with the great Tudor rose on breast and back, with smaller roses besides. After the heat of the day the coolness was delicious, and the busy prospect of the river, that great highway for the Londoners' business and pleasure, was full of interest for a newcomer.

The wherries of the watermen bobbed at every stair, or sculled, deep laden with citizens and their wives, to and fro across the slowly swirling tide. Sir Robert sat with the Secretary, gravely listening to his talk of the alterations according to the Italian fashion in progress at his country house, and of the man he had found who could carve planks of solid oak to look as fine as lace.

Sir James, drowsy after his journey and comforted with subtle food, sat watching the panorama of the river, blinking as the sun sent a last flare of gold to be reflected by all the diamond casements on the tall, top-heavy houses of London Bridge, casting a thoughtful eye on the green-slimed timbers below the sullen water-gateway of the Tower, noting the evidences of prosperity increased since his last visit, in the quays piled high with goods, the busy porters and the many ships which lay below, in the Pool, home at last from all the seas of the world, with sailors working late in a whirl of noisy gulls to unload their cargoes, or to prepare for putting out to sea again with the morning tide. Here and there, in the shipyards, hammers still rang in the mellow light as the towering hulls of the galleons rose in a forest of bare poles. Cecil



turned from his talk of mazes and clipped yews and peacocks on the terraces to answer a question about the shipwrights' work.

"They cover the keel of a ship which will sail for tropic seas with thin sheets of lead, Sir James," he explained. "Since they say that a certain worm is bred there which will eat its way through the strongest oak. It is a fine, stirring sight to see those ships rise by Thames-side. Are they as busy by the Forth?"

"Indeed, it is long enough since I had leisure to go there," said Sir James warily. "Though as a boy I spent many a holiday at the water's edge."

"Ah, yes," said Sir William, losing interest. Sir Robert brushed a hand across his white moustache to hide a smile. For a time they sat silent, listening to the creak and thud of oars in the rowlocks and the rhythmic shock of their blades on the smoothly ebbing tide. They reached Greenwich in the dusk, through which the lights from the high windows and the sound of music wavered across the water.

"The Queen is dancing after supper," said Cecil, after making an inquiry from an official. "I will lead you to a balcony from which you can look down upon the scene, while I choose my moment to bring your news to her Majesty."

The two Scotsmen were led upstairs to an alcove hidden behind curtains, near the gallery where the musicians worked furiously at the music which sent the vivid company below whirling about the hall like a drift of rose-petals. Heavy perfumes rose up at them, with the reek of all the wicks in the great central candelabra which hung on a level with their eyes. It was apparently a riotous occasion: the pale-faced musicians tore at their lute-strings and sent their bows jiggling madly across their fiddles while the dancers below eddied and turned,

the vivid gowns of the women spreading out like peacocks' tails in the studied splendour of the curtsy, then whisked up again into a new and romping measure, from which at last they sank exhausted as the music died.

In the musicians' gallery a fiddler drew the back of his hand across his brow, while another stooped for the tankard of ale gripped between his feet for safe custody. Sir James Melville leaned across to his brother and whispered, "There is the Queen, gay as the spirit of Carnival. We come in a good hour."

Sir Robert's eyes followed his brother's over the dance floor, across which Cecil was shouldering his way between the laughing groups, towards a knot of women fanning themselves in a deep window embrasure. They saw him kneel, then rise as a long white hand beckoned to whisper a few words in the ear of a waspishly gorgeous woman, whose cold yet passionate face seemed scarcely stirred by all her laughter. Their effect was immediate. With a swirl of yellow and black brocade the Queen turned her back on him, stepped to the window with long, even strides like a man's, and stood, leaning on the stone sill and looking out over the water, her towering ruff and brilliant, jewel-dressed hair silhouetted against the darkness which accentuated the pallor of her high-nosed profile. All over the ballroom talk died to whispers, heads turned and knots of courtiers gathered, staring.

Cecil, his fine head slightly bowed, finger and thumb pulling at his lower lip, stood waiting. The hall was very quiet. When at last the Queen spoke her voice was strident, and her knuckles pounded on the stone before her as if to ease a crueller pang.

"The Queen of Scots," she said, "is lighter of a fair son. And I——" she laughed so that kindly Robert Melville, listening in the alcove, winced at the pain of it, "I am but a barren stock."

So she stood, minute after minute, while behind her the company stirred and whispered. But her silence lay like lead upon their merriment, till at last the Master of the Household, greatly daring, signalled to the idle musicians, agape over the gallery rail. But at the first note the Queen swung round, her face so deathlike and her gesture so enraged that the music quavered absurdly into silence, and by twos and threes the company began to sidle from the hall.

The brothers looked at each other with raised brows while they waited for Cecil, who came back to them at last, his calm unbroken by the news that the Queen would see nobody that night, but summoned them to an audience next morning. Meanwhile, she trusted they would accept the hospitality of her house.

Sir Robert nodded gravely, but later, alone with his brother, he shook his head over their reception.

"I do not like it," he said, as he carefully folded his cloak before laying it aside. "I would give a great deal to know what she has in her mind."

"Whatever it may be," grumbled his brother, "you must own, Robert, it was no great occasion for these silken shanks."

Sir Robert brushed the triviality aside. "There has been talk of an understanding with the Archduke Charles," he said, as he shrugged himself free of the heavy velvet of his gorgeously padded doublet and stood before the window, stretching his arms above his head in a long luxurious yawn. Then he frowned as he sat down to kick off his fine shoes, with a grimace for their pinching. "Her marriage would wreck our hopes," he said, as he eased his cramped toes. "For if the Queen of England provides her country with an heir of her own body, where then is our Queen? And her Prince?"

Sir James's reply was muffled as he pulled his shirt over

his head. "The Queen of England begins to look her age," he added, as he emerged. His broad shoulders, deeply muscled, were striped with the creases of several old sword cuts.

"Man," said his brother, in genuine consternation, "never say that here. It is as much as your life is worth. And she is little more than three-and-thirty. We shall not be safe for as long again. Longer, perhaps; who knows? She might marry in her dotage. The ways of women are strange, and God knows that the ways of Queens are stranger still."

"You think she will marry, then?"

Robert Melville snapped his fingers. "How do I know? What does any man know? Her councillors urge this match, then that. But she says nothing. Here in London I listen to all manner of strange talk. But I make nothing of it. We can but bide our time."

"If she would mention the Succession," grumbled Sir James. "We would all know where we were."

"Which is just what she does not wish us to know, James," said Sir Robert, "since it is not certain that what is best for Scotland can for once in all history be best for England too. Ask her yourself, when to-morrow comes, and see what answer you get."

"I will," murmured Sir James, already drowsy as he stretched out between the sheets.

Next morning brought a glory of full sunshine which set the reflections from the tiny Thames wavelets shimmering and dancing on the richly moulded ceiling of the room where the brothers lay. A game of swans jostled greedily round the steps to which the ladies-in-waiting would presently come to feed them. In the gardens of the Palace the Melvilles walked between tall hedges of clipped box, warm and fragrant in the sun, admiring the gorgeous beds of flowers over which the gardeners worked,

clipping the edges of their fantastic, knotted shapes, and nipping off dead blooms ready for the hour when the Queen would walk there, eagle-eyed.

Towards them came Cecil, deliberate and smiling as before.

"The Queen will see you, gentlemen."

They followed him indoors, blinded by the first contrast from sunshine to shadow, remembering, as they entered the great hall, the tense and tragic figure of the night before. But as they stood by the door to bow, and advanced across the dance-floor to kneel below the dais where the same woman waited for them, memory of that earlier scene dwindled, unreal as a dream.

The very setting was changed. Sunlight lay fretted across the floor, casements were flung wide on the smiling river, and the Queen who greeted them also smiled.

Sir Robert presented his brother, who had come with such great news from Scotland. Sir James knelt, as the custom was, kissed the letter of credit he had brought, and held it out to the Queen.

Elizabeth waved it away and gave him her hand to kiss instead. "I had not forgotten the good Sir James," she said, "and I have had a whisper of his news. Stand up, sir, I cannot keep you kneeling there when it recovered me from a heavy sickness. Yes, a sickness indeed. I had lain under it for the past fifteen days. But my good Cecil," she smiled over her shoulder at the quiet Secretary, "brought me your tidings and I was cured of it in that hour. A triumph, eh?"

"A triumph, indeed, Madam," said Sir James gently.

The Queen sat before him in her richest gown, crusted and scintillating with jewels. Her hair was strewn with them, more hung from her ears, stiffened her fingers to the knuckles. And within all her finery sat a thin, proud woman, who had lost beauty and gained terror as the

freshness of youth forsook her, whose eyes were remote as she laughed and clapped her hands. "The best news I have heard for many a long day. I take it kindly of your Queen to send so swift a messenger. And I thank you for your diligence, Sir James."

"Madam," said Sir James, "the Queen my mistress knew that all her friends would rejoice with her over her delivery. The doctors say that she was in great danger for a time."

"It is the way of such things," said Elizabeth lightly.

"The Queen of Scotland," went on Sir James, remembering the talk of the Archduke Charles, "endured so much that she cried aloud that she wished she had never been married. It is a dreadful ordeal for a woman, Madam, and worse for a Queen."

"Yet Queens are but women in these matters, sir."

"That is true." He had hardly improved things, it seemed, so he went hastily on to the next part of his duties. "Her Majesty has instructed me to request the honour of the Queen of England as gossip to the Prince."

Elizabeth was gracious. She would be delighted. She was most zealous for the welfare of the Scottish Prince. It would be a pleasant duty to stand godmother to so interesting a child.

"Perhaps, Madam, this happy occasion will offer you the chance of meeting the Queen of Scotland as you have sometimes wished," suggested the elder Melville.

The flicker of expression which displaced the royal smile for an instant was gone before the men before her could guess its meaning. It had been as sudden, as blighting, as a frost in a summer garden. But the next instant the sun shone again.

"Why, Sir Robert," said the Queen, "you have spoken my dearest wish. If my estate and affairs—and my statesmen," she flicked her fan towards the silent Cecil, "are

good enough to permit me, I will come. If not, you may be sure that I will send the most honourable lords and ladies of my kingdom in my stead."

Sir Robert bowed, then, raising his head from the rebuke, nodded a signal to his brother to approach the crux of the matter at last.

Sir James spoke quickly. It had been in his mind as he journeyed across the whole fair kingdom of England, he said, that it would be a great joy to have some good news to bear north again in exchange for the news he had brought to London. He therefore ventured to approach her Majesty——

Elizabeth's smiling face was as benign as ever as she listened. Only the slightest stiffening, the merest shadow in those small and brilliant eyes, betrayed that she was on her guard.

"Surely, Sir James, you may seek favours with confidence at such a time."

"I presume only because these favours are not for myself, not even only for the realm of Scotland, but for England also, and for yourself at last," said Sir James, with growing urgency, while Sir Robert, watching the Queen, chewed at the lower strands of his moustache. He knew enough of the Queen's moods to mistrust that shining, innocent gaiety, as something backed with steel.

"Speak on, then, Sir James," said the Queen. "At least no one can be thought reluctant to grant favours to herself."

"Then, Madam," said Sir James, "it must needs set many hearts at rest both in my Queen's country and in yours to know that the Queen of Scotland is named second person in succession to your Majesty. I am assured," he went on, as Elizabeth sat silent, the smile still on her face, her eyes alert, "that your Majesty has only formally delayed the declaration till you might be

assured of the future. The Prince now born to us must set such doubts at rest. God has been gracious to us. I am confident that your Majesty——”

“Indeed, Sir James,” said Elizabeth, with that naïve air of indecision which he most disliked, “the birth of the Prince will be a spur to set the most skilful lawyers trying out the matter with still greater diligence.”

“Your Majesty knows well,” said Sir James earnestly, “that the Queen of Scots would never seek any place or right in England but by your own favour and furtherance.”

Elizabeth brushed away the possibility of any such presumption with the flick of an ostrich-feather fan. “As for her right in England,” she said gently, “I esteem it to belong to my good sister most justly. I wish in my heart, gentlemen, that it may be in that way decided.”

“So you gave me to understand last time the matter was brought up,” said Sir James dryly. “Need I say with what pride I would bear still better news home?”

“I have planned,” smiled Elizabeth, “to send such news, if it may be sent, as part of my baptismal gift, and the noblemen who come north on that great and joyful occasion will expect to have the honour of bringing it.”

“I shall inform her Majesty,” said Sir James in a gloomy tone. He liked the look of things still less as the Queen held out impulsive hands. Her smile implored him, mocked him.

“Ah, Sir James, Sir James, do not bear a grudge against me. A Queen who reigns alone is in the hands of her advisers. I dare not hazard the course of justice which bears my country’s welfare for the sake of the affection I bear in my person to the person of your Queen.”

“Your Majesty is most—scrupulous,” said Sir James. “And now I beg permission to take my leave.”



"With no hard words, no unkind thoughts, Sir James, I hope?"

"With no hard words, indeed, your Majesty. My thoughts are sad, for I see no comfort and security for any of us till the Succession is made known."

Elizabeth laughed as she gave him her hand to kiss, but her rings struck coldly at his lips. As the brothers paused in the doorway to bow for the last time, they saw she had forgotten them. Her face was turned towards her Secretary, all softness and hesitation gone from it as she questioned him acutely on the contents of the document he was unrolling before her.

"Well, Robert?" said Sir James, as they waited for a boat at the water's edge.

"These are but shifts," said Sir Robert glumly. "I thought as much. Well, I will do what I can, here in England, to search out the Queen's mind. I have no hope of changing it. No, none at all."

"And I misdoubt my welcome in Edinburgh, with such news as I bring, which is to say no news whatever," said Sir James. He took off his cap and drew his hand across his brow as they sat in the wherry. "How you can endure this soft south country, Robert, passes my comprehension. I feel as stupid as a drunken fowl."

"One comes to it, one comes to it," murmured Sir Robert, pleating the ruffle at his wrist with careful fingers. "It is kind to rheumatic bones."

"You may find the climate kinder than the Queen," his brother murmured under cover of the splash of careless oarsmen.

"As to that—well——" Sir Robert lifted his hands in a gesture of indifference. "We shall see. One man makes his bed on a battlefield, another beside a barrel of gunpowder. The one sleeps as well as the other. I have

messages for our family, James. Can you wait till I take pen and ink to them?"

"Well enough. I will sleep to-night in London. My rascals have still sore heads, no doubt. I will ride to-morrow, at the first light."

And so next morning, when only the market-folk were astir, a disgruntled ambassador, unappeased by the present of a fair chain of gold sent by the Queen's instructions, took his leave, followed by a tail of disillusioned followers with empty pockets. He trotted his horse over the sounding cobbles and through the city gates. The morning sun was already warm on their shoulders as they took the long road to the north.

## CHAPTER FOUR

ANDREW HALIBURTON FASTENED his furred winter cloak at his throat and gave his senior apprentice precise directions for the half-hour of his probable absence. Rob, who had heard these things many times before, listened with apparent attention as he stood before his master, his knees slightly bent, his head lowered, like a tired horse. Occasionally he sniffed, for he was a chilly young man who had not yet caught up with his growth: he was troubled with chilblains and a drop at the end of his nose during the slow, inexorable months of an Edinburgh winter.

"If an important customer should come, send Willy for me at once. Deal out the kerseys and fustians, keeping strict account, but do not stand sniffing over my best brocades. I am going no farther than the house of James Mossman, goldsmith, by the Netherbow."

Rob sniffed, then did his best to cover the infuriating sound with a laboriously manufactured cough.

Master Haliburton swung briskly out of the booth and set off down the High Street to the gabled and galleried old house where James Mossman lived by the Netherbow. It was a brilliant, icy morning, just before Christmas, 1566, six months after the return of Sir James Melville from England. Meanwhile, much had happened. The Prince had been christened at Stirling three days before, and it was of this important ceremony that Andrew Haliburton hoped to learn, for his friend Mossman held the post of jeweller to her Majesty and had been to Stirling himself.

James Mossman greeted his visitor with delight, and pushed him cheerfully upstairs to a room where a fine fire blazed and his wife was mulling ale with deliberate ritual and a series of smacking sips. "Come away now, Master Haliburton," she said. "I will have a measure waiting for you presently."

"Unless she finishes it herself before that with her tasting, eh, Andrew," chuckled the jeweller, sitting heavily down upon the settle beside his guest. He was a stout and wheezy man, past middle age, with an enormous, pasty face, in which his small black eyes were almost buried, like currants in a bannock. "Strip off that cloak of yours," he urged, "and give me the news of the capital. I am new back."

"So I thought," said Andrew Haliburton. "And I came to seek news, not bring it. There's little enough going on here, with the Court away. Tell me about the goings on at Stirling, man, at the grand baptism. Did you see the company assembled or were you sent packing once the gifts for the nobility had been delivered to the Queen?"

"Sent packing? I?" boomed James Mossman. "Indeed, I was not. I saw it all. And a pretty business it was. Aye, a pretty business, with many rich presents, in return for which the Queen gave the heaviest and costliest chains I could make for her. These chains——"

"Tell me of the foreign princes' presents," said the merchant hastily.

"The foreign princes?" Mossman's heavy lips pouted with disappointment. "Well, they were suitable enough. The Queen of England sent by the Earl of Bedford a font of sheer gold, which weighed all but three hundred and forty ounces. . . ."

"That was handsome," admitted Master Haliburton.

The jeweller nodded, pursing his lips. "From the King

of France, too, came a necklace of pearls and rubies with two superb earrings"—Master Mossman held up the pudgy first finger and thumb of each hand as if the jewelled things dangled from them, his head on one side and his lips rounded into a whistle.

"Fine, very fine," said Andrew Haliburton.

"Ih'm. Not so bad," agreed the jeweller. "Ah, but you should have seen what I prepared for the Queen's gifts in return. There was workmanship, Andrew. You should have seen——"

"I did," interrupted the merchant. "Were they not displayed, behind locked doors, to all your trustiest friends?"

But Master Mossman proceeded unchecked. "A great chain, set with diamonds after my own design, for the Duke of Bedford, another with pearls which I journeyed to Antwerp myself to choose from the Eastern dealers, to be given to Mr. Carey, together with a ring, exquisitely set in my own fashion with——"

"An officer of the Queen's guard was in my booth to-day with some story that the French thought too much honour was shown to the English and too little to them. What about that, now?"

Master Mossman's flicked fingers made nothing of it. "There will always be such talk when ambassadors meet for great occasions. But I remember a scene at the banquet which did show some feeling. There was to be a masque, written by George Buchanan the scholar and set to movement by a young man of the Queen's household, Sebastian they call him, a merry young man, and a great favourite, because of his laughter, with the Queen. He is to be married, too, in a couple of months' time, and I have orders for that festivity also. The Queen has ordered me to make, with my usual skill——"

"What about this trouble at the banquet?" demanded Andrew Haliburton.

"That? Oh, a petty affair. Sebastian's satyrs danced into the great hall before the meat which was wonderfully propelled by some mechanic's device so that it seemed to roll after them upon its buffet without the help of men's hands. So far, good. But the satyrs at Sebastian's whisper reached round for their tails and wagged them in the faces of the English gentlemen, who are, it seems, tender on the subject of tails because of some story which I have forgotten. They might well have looked the other way, but they chose to consider themselves affronted, so that the Queen and the Duke of Bedford had trouble enough to quiet them from their talk of sheathing their daggers in Sebastian's guts."

"And the King, what had he to say?"

"The King?" The jeweller shook his head. "He was not at the banquet."

"Not at the banquet? But why, by all that's strange?"

"Strange enough. I scarcely saw him. He kept his rooms most of the time. Some said that he was affronted and others that he was afraid of the Queen's tongue."

"Tuts, that was not right, not right at all."

"The Duke of Bedford was not pleased. I heard him say that he was full of admiration for the Queen's person, but not for the way she let her husband creep round after her like a puppy on a string. He was not even at the baptism."

"I wonder what the Queen was thinking of," said Andrew Haliburton. "It looks bad that, ihmhm, very bad. But by all accounts it was a gaudy show. I had to send my fairest stuffs to Stirling."

"Aye, it was gaudy. But Popish, man, Popish."

"And *that'll* make for trouble, if nothing else does."

Whatever in the world made them bring Popish rites to a Reformed country?"

"It seems it was the Queen's wish. A strange ceremony. It would have stricken you, old friend, to see so many candle-droppings disfiguring so much fine stuff. For two rows of gentlemen, each with a lighted pricket, lined the way from the Prince's room to the chapel, and there is near as much wind in those corridors as on the hills outside."

"Tch, tch," said Andrew Haliburton. "But they will come to me the sooner for the stuffs to make new habits. Tell me of this ceremony."

"The French ambassador carried the Prince in his arms to the chapel, walking like a man set to find his way blindfold between eggs." The jeweller chuckled. "There was such a roaring from the manikin that you could scarce hear his excellency curse as he went. Then came my lord of Atholl with the great sierge of wax, the Earl of Eglinton with the salt, my lord Sempill bearing the Rood, and my lord Ross with the basin and laver. So they came to the chapel, where the Archbishop of Hamilton, three bishops and dear knows how many lesser priestlings swung censers and lit candles as if there had been neither Knox nor Reformation."

"He will not let that lie," opined the merchant. "Some one will smart for it."

"So thought the more cautious," chuckled the jeweller. "They stood in the doorway, where they could see but need take no part."

"Many people seek such safety," smiled Master Haliburton. "Yet it is but a doubtful choice. For if a man stands doubled up at a keyhole how is he to be aware of a boot preparing for his backside?"

The jeweller nodded. "I hate such doubtful friends. They say that the ceremony was arranged by my lord of Bothwell, yet when it came to the point he stood outside,

giving the Countess of Argyle a ruby worth five hundred crowns—this I know, for he bought it of me—to go into the chapel instead of him.”

“I have heard a good deal about this Bothwell lately,” said Andrew Haliburton, stroking his beard.

“You would have heard still more had you been at Stirling,” said the jeweller with a grimace. “His name buzzed on men’s and women’s lips like bees at swarming-time. James Hepburn said this . . . the Earl of Bothwell has done that . . . he is here . . . he went there . . . he told the Queen . . . he attended the ladies . . . he is hunting . . . he is asleep . . . he is drunk . . . Bah,” the pudgy fingers snapped again. “I am sick of the sound of his name.”

“But is there any substance in the talk?” probed Master Haliburton.

James Mossman tilted more ale into his tankard, then, as an afterthought, into that of his guest. “Something . . . something,” he admitted. “I have seen it myself. The Queen has come to him, across a crowded hall, as if the room were empty.”

“What can she see in such a man? There is no pleasure in dealing with him. He is a creature for leather and steel, but vain as a peacock, and looks as odd in my finest brocades as a dog dressed up for a fair.”

“He has a certain smile,” said the jeweller slowly, as he swirled the last of his ale round his tankard to take the full flavour of the spice, “a smile which breaks suddenly from under those great brows of his like fire from a black opal when it is twisted to the light. A woman might lose her head for it, as I understand these things.”

“Her throne, too, perhaps?”

“God forbid, the sweet lady,” said James Mossman.

“Where is she now? At Stirling, with the Prince?”

“The Prince remains, in the charge of the Earl of Mar



and his lady, as the custom is, but the Queen is away to spend Christmas at Drummond Castle."

"With the King?"

The jeweller shook his head. "The King has gone to his father's house in Glasgow. My lord of Bothwell is with her."

Andrew Haliburton pursed his lips in a soundless whistle, while old Mossman nodded gloomily. "There is more yet," he said, wiping his lips with the back of his great hand. "The lords banished for the Rizzio affair, Moray, Morton and the others, are back, with no Christian feelings for the King in their hearts, one would suppose, since it was he who informed against them to the Queen. Bothwell has been seen with them, too."

"It wanted but that," the merchant agreed. "And now, what next? Ah well, James, it is better to be quiet and simple burgesses at such a time as this, when the east wind sets the hangings clattering on palace walls. A tradesman is too useful to be dispatched with a knife in his belly for the sake of a whim. Well, I must take myself back to my business, for fear that orders come in with only my sniffing Rob to match the velvets and flatter the wearers. The ale has warmed my stomach against the frost."

They went down the stair together. On the doorstep the merchant paused. "Are you indeed talking of flitting from this house?" he said. "You once found it so much to your taste, here at the city's gate, where every one must pass."

"Aye, I'm flitting. The house is well enough, but I have all the business I need, Andrew, without sitting here to seek more."

"Have you so?" said the merchant.

The elder man nodded complacently. "Ihmhm, I'm not doing so badly, not so badly at all. But there's too

much traffic, nowadays, Andrew, over the cobbles. It deaves me. Time was when there was just a few carts in and out on market days, and decent poor folk carried their goods on their own backs. But now every man of them must sit up on his bit cart and rattle up and down as if he would hardly ken the King when he met him. I'm after a quieter place, with a garden, maybe, to walk in of an evening. I was thinking of the Canongate outside the walls."

"All among the gentry?" The merchant's eyes twinkled. "Well, well, it's grand to work for a Queen who likes pretty things. But what about this house here which isn't fine enough for you now?"

"Oh, I have an offer," murmured the jeweller, rubbing his plump palms together. "A good offer, too. Master Knox, no less, has visited me, and said it would suit him well. He will bring his young bride here, if I take his price."

The small black eyes disappeared again, as Mossman giggled and slanted an elbow towards the merchant's ribs. "Fine times, Andrew, fine times. A man of fifty-nine does not win the heart of a lass of sixteen every day, though he'd often like to. Aye, aye, it's strange. When we go courting in our first youth we're easy caught by the widow women, and when we set off again in our old age it's youth we want, a young body to warm our old bones."

"I will be going," said Andrew Haliburton. "It is best not to talk of the head of the Kirk so except between stout walls."

"You are right, you are indeed right," beamed the jeweller. "And this frost is as unkind as ever. I will warm *my* old bones by my fireside." He clapped his door shut, and Andrew Haliburton walked thoughtfully up the street.

In Drummond Castle the Queen kept Christmas, and at his father's Glasgow house young Darnley, courtesy King of Scotland, poured out his grievances to the angry Earl of Lennox. Early in the new year he had other things to think of, for there was smallpox about, and the sulky young man went down with it, to lie babbling of lovely scolds and promises of forgiveness gone down the wind.

January came in with flurries of snow and wilder flurries of rumour which circled round the heads of the ambitious Moray and the dour, avaricious Morton, as the flakes whirled round the Mercat Cross. About them, and their lesser creatures, went the whispers of hurried conclaves, the footsteps of secret messengers who carried news of their schemes to the Queen of England, the chime of the coins she sent back to keep Scotland by the ears.

Business was bad, for no man knew what might come next. Andrew Haliburton twisted his beard and countermanded cargoes from Antwerp. What profit might a man look for, with the whole country of Scotland restless as a cauldron on the boil? And since he and his family must live if they could not prosper he ransacked his chest for stuffs which had lain there since the previous summer, and displayed them cannily to all comers as the new season's goods. Even so, the buyers were wary, too, and he grumbled often over the fire of an evening that there was no money coming into the house, while Rob whimpered over his chilblains, and Willy, that cheerful young man who had never much enthusiasm for merchandise, was caught up by the fretting fever of the time and talked daily of taking service with the Earl of Morton, where a man got a chance of seeing the world.

He swaggered about the booth, in his master's absence, to the aggravation of the sober Rob and the gaping admiration of young Walter, who spent all his hours out

of school at his heels, only pounding wildly down the causeway at the very last moment, to explode into the fighting mob outside the schoolhouse a bare second before the long-faced dominie grudgingly opened the door.

So the days lengthened, and the cold strengthened, as the old wives croaked, huddled in their cupboard beds in the walls, shaking their heads in their neat frilled mutches over the sorest winter the Lord had seen fit to send into Scotland, as they had shaken them every year since the northern chill first seared the aches into their bones.

Andrew Haliburton made a good sale at the beginning of February, since many of his best customers needed new clothes for the wedding of the Queen's servant Sebastian at the Palace. The servants who elbowed each other in the door of his booth brought gossip with them: the Queen had visited the King at Glasgow and some said that she had thought him poisoned, since all his hair had fallen out during his sickness. At all events, she had taken him away, as soon as he was fit to travel, and established him in a house by the Kirk o' Field, where she visited him daily and hoped that the fine air of Edinburgh would do him good.

Looking sharply up from his great ledger Andrew Haliburton surprised the speaker in a wink, and a listener in a nudge. They laughed together, but the merchant shook his head as he sent his shears snapping at the fine cloth, white taffeta with a golden design of dolphins and sea-shells, which was to be worn by the bride.

Mere straws they might be, but he did not like the way the wind was setting. He heard other things, too, from the Palace servants. The Prince had been brought to Holyroodhouse to be with his mother: his wet-nurse, who turned out to be a drunken old hussy, had been dismissed for dropping the infant on to a stone floor, and the doctors were greatly afraid of some damage to his legs.

Though, indeed, said the young man who spoke of it, his Highness's yells had been audible all over Holyroodhouse, and he thought no great harm was done, at least not to his vitals.

The second week in February was memorable for the Haliburton family, since Joseph, the merchant's eldest brother, had arrived on a visit from Antwerp, and a goose was cooked in his honour on the Sabbath evening, the ninth of the month. The news which Master Joseph brought from the Netherlands was not encouraging. He even went as far as to say that the prosperity of Antwerp, at its peak point ten years before, seemed unlikely to recover from the death of their great Emperor. For Charles V. had been a Fleming born, with the interests of his country near his heart. What could be now looked for from that intemperate Catholic and arrogant Spaniard, Philip II., save bitter persecution and bitterer taxes?

"I have heard the Prince of Orange well spoken of," said Andrew Haliburton.

But his brother pushed out a disdainful lower lip and shook his head. "His courage is less in debate than his wisdom, Andrew. Among merchants like ourselves it is feared that King Philip means now to crush Protestantism and independence together. The Duke of Alva, they tell us, is already on his way from Spain."

"How much will these matters of policy and religion affect our trade?"

Joseph Haliburton shook his big head. "As yet, no man can say. It depends on the resistance he meets with." And he turned to survey his nephew, who squirmed uneasily on his bench. For Walter went in some awe of his uncle, who had a disquieting way of looking him up and down as they sat at meals, stroking the white beard which gave his face the awful grandeur of a patriarch, while he shot alarming questions at him from the corner of his

mouth. "Let us hope that trade will survive him, for the sake of those who will follow us. Are you coming to learn your business in our warehouse at Antwerp, one day, boy?"

"I hope so, sir."

"H'm." The elder merchant's fish-cold eyes swung away from his nephew. "Talking of business, Andrew, I would be glad to go through those books of yours, as was arranged. If you will have the board left standing we might study them here and be warm. What d'you say, Margaret?"

"Give me time to lift the cloth," said the merchant's wife, "before you clash those great dirty books down upon it, and you may do what you like."

So the apprentices were sent down for the account books, and Willy piled his share upon Rob's, so that he tottered back, books level with his chin, while Willy took his chance of slipping away down the stair into the darkness of the street, and dashed off towards the Nether-bow, in search of friends. There he halted, to peer over the shoulders of the crowd which had gathered to watch the party of soldiers and torches who seemed to be escorting some one of importance.

Willy shouldered his way into the front rank. "What is it? Who goes by?"

"How should I know?" said the boy beside him.

But a citizen standing near was better informed. "It is the Queen on her way back to Holyroodhouse from Kirk o' Field," he said. "It will be for the wedding, or so I heard them say at the guard-house."

"If she were *my* wife," said Willy jauntily, "I would keep her in my own bed, and let her go less to the bedding of other people."

"Young man, you would do well to speak less of your betters with such impudence," said the citizen at his elbow.

But Willy reached out to tweak his beard before turning to run from his lifted cudgel.

"The younger generation has neither decency nor reverence, these days," grumbled the citizen as he stumped home through the dark city, where the lights in high windows would soon go out as hard-working men and women who must be astir next morning long before the winter daybreak snuffed out candle and cruisie, and turned to their beds. But they were not to sleep long undisturbed. It was at the darkest, bleakest hour of the night that the thundering crack of an explosion nearby shook every window and door in the city, so that women screamed of the Judgment, and men blenched as they huddled on their clothes.

Once out of doors they ran hither and thither, shouting questions which nobody could answer, while the streets flared with lights and rang with steel as householders armed themselves to defend their wives and goods against they knew not what. Yet if it were a judgment, it seemed to be from man, not of God, since no graves opened, and their houses still stood. So they ran on, half-dressed, half-armed, while through the confusion wild rumours spread and grew, rumours that took shape, towards morning, into a mounting clamour of: "*the King . . .*" and "*Kirk o' Field.*"

Before noon Joseph Haliburton took leave of his relations, and his brother hired a couple of horses to see him as far as the port of Leith. Here, too, there was confusion. The King was dead. Bothwell had killed him. No, it was Moray. It could not be Moray, for he had ridden off yesterday without waiting for the sermon, to his wife who lay in childbed at St. Andrews. That proved him innocent, men argued. But did it? Or was he merely careful to be elsewhere? Then it was Morton. No, it was Bothwell. Did the Queen know of it? No.

Yes. Yes. Assuredly. Not she, it was a filthy slander: had she not visited her husband that very afternoon? And was she not careful to leave early? She left for the wedding of her musician Sebastian. And would she have thought it of such account if she had not wished herself out of harm's way? So they talked, loudly and angrily. Some were excited, but more, among the simple people, afraid.

Andrew Haliburton returned, thoughtful, to his booth. So the simmering cauldron had come to the boil at last. What would become of the quiet citizens of Edinburgh, who had no part in such affairs?

He waited anxiously as events marched on. The Queen, declaring that since the King's murder neither she nor her son were safe, sent the Prince with his household back to Stirling, in the care of the Earl of Mar and his strong-minded Countess, Anabella Murray. She herself set up her Court in Edinburgh Castle, since it was better to be in a stronghold than a palace while murderers were at large.

But in Edinburgh they spoke everywhere of Bothwell's guilt. Proclamations against him were nailed to the Tolbooth doors after dark, and the market people hissed him from behind their stalls as he rode scowling past to pay his respects to the Queen. Fifty men were with him, and every one of them made a great parade of the new spear his leader had ordered him to buy.

Andrew Haliburton, talking to the jeweller Mossman through the window of his booth, shook his head at the sight. "Brazen, brazen," he sighed. "It will not be long before they couple the Queen's name with his at this rate. What madness, to let him into her sight."

"Please God she allows no more," said the old jeweller. "To see her married to that fellow would be to set a diamond on the finger of an ape."



"But surely you never think——?"

"I do not know. They say——"

"They will say anything," fumed Andrew Haliburton. "Bothwell is newly married, to the Earl of Huntly's sister."

"And is there no such thing as divorce?" said the jeweller glumly. "If the King of England could set aside his wife because another took his fancy, so can the Earl of Bothwell."

"She cannot dream—but surely she has sense——"

"What is sense?" said James Mossman sourly. "Nothing but the temperature of the blood, after all. But we will hope, we will hope. I like to see you, my friend, so much concerned for the Queen."

"The Queen!" said Andrew Haliburton in angry dismay. "I am thinking of my merchandise."

The jeweller chuckled. "Let us hope things improve for both."

"They will go from bad to worse," said Andrew Haliburton.

He was right. At a packed and utterly unconvincing trial in April Bothwell was acquitted of any share in the King's death, in spite of the loudly persistent outcry of the Earl of Lennox against his son's murderer. In the same month the Queen was seized as she came back from Stirling, where her infant son had cried and struck at her as she tried too impulsively to kiss him. Bothwell himself laid a hand on her horse's bridle, and led her, some said in tears, but many otherwise, away with him to Dunbar.

In May, at Holyroodhouse, she married him, offering the Duchy of Orkney as a bridal gift. Hate gathered round him, infected her, reached upward at her throne. By June a confederacy of the greatest lords in the kingdom was bound against them both. The ruinous purpose of

Moray and Morton was almost accomplished, though Moray, that wary conspirator, took his leave for France before the final crash. It must not be said that the man who was fittest to rule Scotland took the field against his Queen. A portrait of impartial grief for the straits of Scotland, he waited in France, while Morton, who furthered his interests because they marched, so far, with his own, led the army which ruined the Queen's cause at Carberry Hill. Deserted by Bothwell, sustained only among so many coarse and greedy men by the promises of that temperate soldier, Kirkcaldy of Grange, she was brought in triumph to Edinburgh as the prisoner of the confederate lords.

News of their coming went before them, and at dinner-time, when they rode from the Netherbow to the Castle, every window and stair-head was jammed with townsfolk who remembered the terror of the explosion which had brought them from their beds that wintry night four months past, remembered the danger to life and property which came with a civil war, remembered the Queen's beauty and pride and popery and saw with delight as she rode past below them, in a mud-splashed petticoat, that she was no better off, if indeed she was not much worse, than they were themselves. It was a great occasion. One did not get a chance, every day, of screaming insults at a Queen.

And besides, all the neighbours were screaming: the sound came along the street ahead of the soldiers, a violent, animal, incoherent uproar that pricked the bowels, made the palms itch, and the throat burn. How small she was. How white. She would not look. She would not listen. Well, she should hear, all the same. Woman pushed each other away from vantage points, leaned far over the railings, shaking fists, stamping, screaming.

"Ah—yah—murderess . . . papist . . . adulterer . . ."

"Burn her, burn her. . . !"

"Burn the whore!"

"Witch . . . !"

"Murderess!"

"Wanton!"

"Burn her!"

"Drown her!"

"Shoot her!"

"Tear her!"

"Yah . . ."

The figure on the restless, frightened horse gave no sign of having heard them. Mary Stuart rode between the ranks of convulsed faces and menacing arms as if she were deaf and blind. Her hands lightly controlled the frightened beast which trembled under her, while once or twice she leaned forward to run a soothing hand down the side of the sweating, straining neck. Her face was set like a stone, but the tears ran down her cheeks unchecked, and the sight of them set the people screaming again, till the sea-gulls at the port of Leith rose in a cloud at the sound which came to them on the west wind.

Walter Haliburton, caught on the way home from school by the uproar, stuck his fingers in his ears, then, nauseated by the pushing, straining bodies, forced himself through the crowd and made his way with hands, feet and teeth, up his own forestair, to burst into the living-room, and come suddenly upon his father who was seated, grim-faced, on the settle by the fire. The cries from the crowd outside swept in with him, and Walter, fists clenched and hair astray, stood in the middle of the floor, stamping his feet in a rage that shook him.

His father greeted him mildly, with arching brows.

"They are beasts, beasts, *beasts*," stammered Walter.

"She is the *Queen* and they shout at her as if she were a slut."

"You might shut the door, son," said his father mildly.

Walter hurled all his weight upon it, finding some little comfort in the vicious slam.

"Sit down," said his father. "So you are a *Queen's* man, already, Walter."

"Indeed . . . indeed I am."

His father twisted his fingers into his crisp, blunt beard. "Then your Uncle Joseph's summons is apt enough," he said. "It is high time you went to Antwerp."

## CHAPTER FIVE

IT WAS THE TWENTY-FIRST day of July, 1567. In the island castle of Loch Leven, Mary Stuart, no longer Queen of Scotland, chose a new bunch of bright silks for the design she had just stretched on her embroidery frame, and drew blood from her finger with a vicious needle-jab.

Her son lay in the Parish Church at Stirling, absurdly lapped in the gold and purple of Coronation robes intended for a grown man, surrounded by the Lords of the Congregation who had deposed his mother. James, thirteen months old, held out his hands for the pretty baubles they had laid in them for an instant, then taken away. He wagged his head from side to side, from the foxy face of James Douglas, Earl of Morton, who was so smugly taking the Coronation oath on his behalf, to the black-bearded Master Knox who was preparing to preach over him. James opened his mouth to yell: he was not yet accustomed to having his wishes thwarted; but the long black beard began to wag as Master Knox declared his text, and Charles James, Prince and Steward of Scotland, stared at it, fascinated, blinking away the trickle of oil which had run from the finger of the Bishop of Orkney towards the corner of his nose. Then he began to smile, secretly, as very small children do, while the Reformer's eloquence flicked that famous beard amusingly up and down before his eyes.

While Master Knox preached at Stirling, Master Brodie prayed in Edinburgh. In the living-room over Andrew Haliburton's booth in the Lawnmarket the family were assembled, with both apprentices and Janet, the serving

woman, all on their knees. Master Brodie's thin face was lifted, his eyes close-shut, as he offered earnest petitions for the safety of Walter, the only son of the house, so soon to set out on a journey to a foreign land.

Walter himself, kneeling beside his mother, and envying her indomitable calm, felt his ears redden and tingle as he tried to endure the publicity of being prayed for by name and in his presence. Surely all that was necessary might have been put into two sentences which asked for a safe journey and a punctual arrival at the far end. But the minister had contrived to keep them on their knees for no less than half an hour, by reason of various petitions for the safety of Walter's soul, the comfort of his parents, the welfare of the Reformed Church and the peace of the distressed country, which Walter resentfully considered had nothing whatever to do with the present occasion.

At last it was over. They rose, averting their eyes from each other. Walter, torn between importance and embarrassment, was inclined to swagger in consequence as his father beckoned him to come forward and shake hands with the minister.

"So you are off to make your fortune, eh?" said Master Brodie. "I have still many things to say to you——" here Walter's smile wavered—"but I hear that there is no time."

"No, Matthew, we must take the road now," said Andrew Haliburton. "The boy leaves Leith with the turn of the tide. The horses hired for the journey are no doubt pawing up the cobbles of my back yard at this moment. Kiss your mother, boy. Go and load up the pack horse, Willy, and prepare to ride with us. Rob, a word with you. The shop is in your hands against my return, and mind you watch it. All prices are listed in the book by the counter: accept no man's note that is not

well known to you, and look well at all coins which are offered. Let the boy go, wife. It's time we were away."

So with a good deal of noise and bustle Andrew Haliburton did his best to make the occasion seem more joyous than it was. Once in the street they were surrounded by the neighbours who had come out to send them off, causing quite an eddy in the normal traffic as they crowded round the stairs, screaming ribald advice, some of which puzzled young Walter considerably, and made Master Brodie shake his head at the speakers from the top of the steps.

Walter's discomfort, as he straddled a horse which was too big for him, and felt his calf-muscles cramp as he stretched downwards for the stirrups, took most of his attention off the first part of the journey. But when he dismounted beside the quay, and saw the sunlight flickering from every ripple on the green and sluggish tide, his excitement rose again.

He sniffed at tar and fingered baggage, gaped at the sailors and the towering masts and mounded ropes, listened to the screeching of the gulls which flung themselves so boldly through the blue air with their red or yellow feet drawn close under their bellies. When angels flew about in Heaven, did they also tuck up their feet, or——

His father's hand upon his shoulder brought his thoughts back to the present crisis, and the sight of a sailor shouldering his brand-new chest up the gang-plank gave it fresh poignancy. His father was smiling, though his voice was roughened, at this moment of parting.

"Since ye've had all the admonition that's good for ye already, I'll say no more," he promised. "Save perhaps that *do unto others what you would have them do to you* is no

bad moral for a trader to take on his travels. It has been mine, with—er—perhaps a few wee reservations, this many a year. Now come along with ye, and I'll put ye in the hands of the man that's going to mind ye on the journey."

Half an hour later the merchant stood alone on the quay, watching the gallant circling of Walter's diminishing cap, while the patched sails filled, cracking, in the gusty wind.

"At least," said Andrew Haliburton, "he is safe out of this uncertain country."

Turning his back with decision on the ebbing tide, he walked back to where Willy was holding the horses and reverentially questioning a couple of men-at-arms in the livery of the Earl of Moray, the Queen's half-brother, who had been summoned home in haste to take up the Regency. All the way home the merchant listened glumly to Willy's excited talk of civil war and the chances of quick advancement for those who knew how to take them.

"I doubt if you'll make much of a merchant of me, sir," said Willy.

"I had not built too much on that hope," said Andrew Haliburton. "Still, while I hold your father's fees, my lad, I must do what I can. And let me hear less of wars and weapons, or I'll lay my rule about your back."

Willy sighed, kicking his sluggish hired horse because he dared not argue with his master. Back in Edinburgh Andrew Haliburton found his wife setting out to visit a neighbour, whose infant son was ailing. He watched her bustle about, collecting an armful of provisions, since the stricken household was too distracted for anybody to think of preparing food, as far as she could tell.

"Her only bairn, poor body. And she's ready to die for fear."

"Poor body," her husband agreed. And then, tenta-



tively added: "our lad will be as safe with Joseph as if he were here with us, Margaret."

"Of course," agreed his wife, wrapping a loaf in a clean cloth.

"The captain was trusty. A fine sailor, too, they say. He promised every care."

"And that's a comfort." His wife clattered about a cupboard in search of cheese.

"They're well armed, too. No pirates would venture to encounter them. I chose the ship for that——"

"It was well thought of." The cupboard door swung shut with a clap.

"Master Brodie put up a fine prayer, wife. The boy goes from us into God's keeping."

"Indeed, yes."

"The sea was calm. The captain did not look for foul weather. As for storms——"

Then suddenly his wife's careful self-control gave way. Whirling, she faced him, her mouth working desperately against the indignity of any display of weakness, her eyelids angrily flickering against a surge of tears. "Speak another word to me, Andrew Haliburton, of storms and pirates and shipwreck and danger and I'll make my bed at my sister's house till news comes safe from Antwerp."

"But—Margaret—I meant nothing but comfort," said the merchant in dismay. "I had no thought of vexing you." He stood contrite before her. "As for the chances of bandits or brigands in the back streets of a foreign city——"

But his wife clapped her hands over her ears and fairly ran away from him, to snatch up the provisions she had collected and hurry towards the stair-head. "Another minute," she said fiercely, "and you will have me persuaded we are never to see the lad again."

Andrew Haliburton followed her anxiously. "But it

was the very opposite that I said," he protested. "Have I not told you that all these things are guarded against?"

"And brought them every one to my mind," wailed his wife, as she set off down the stair.

"Women, women . . ." said Andrew Haliburton as he went down the stair himself. "They are without sense of reason." Shaking his head, he stumped gloomily into his booth.

After Walter's departure the slow-moving, uneventful life of every day seemed to settle down on the Haliburton family, as it settled down, more or less, upon the city of Edinburgh. The Good Regent Moray set about the business of government with all the vigour of the proverbial new broom, that zeal which outreaches discretion. He went busily about the country, organising expeditions against the reivers of the Border, and holding justice-eyres in this town and that, where men of the lower classes were dealt with severely, and a sort of rough orderliness enforced with the flat of his soldiers' swords.

But he showed less enthusiasm for settling the differences between the opposing great houses of the kingdom. With care and patience, he might have contrived to strengthen his country and his personal position with a united nobility at his back, but he was wiled away from that opportunity by the advice of the lesser mischief-making people, who found it to their interest that the Regent should antagonise many of the great lords, for their own chances of advancement were better when the Regent's old friends began to turn from him.

Some did not leave him without a struggle. Sir James Melville, walking through the gardens at Holyrood one day that summer, contrived at last to separate the Regent from his attentive companions.

"Well, James, well, James; you have a black and thoughtful look about you," said the Regent uneasily.

"What business brings you here to send my councillors packing?"

"Councillors!" said Sir James. "Lapdogs, more likely. What ails you, these days, Moray, that you must have this lick-spittle flurry at your heels?"

The Regent swung round angrily upon his questioner. They stood in the rose alley which the Queen had made the Palace gardeners build after the Southern fashion. In the sharp Scottish air the roses had been somewhat nipped, though they flowered bravely enough, these August days. Sir James was picking one, so that Regent's angry eyes and stamping foot were a little lost upon him. "I will not be spoken to so," blustered the Regent Moray. "If I am fit to govern Scotland, am I not also fit to choose my friends?"

"Surely, surely," said Sir James, as he stripped the stem of thorns and twirled it between finger and thumb. "Yet when we two read the Latin authors together as bairns at our book did we not come on a maxim: 'the wise prince rules by permitting his servants to tell him the verity of his estate'?"

"I am the best judge of the state of Scotland," said the Regent pettishly. He turned to pace back up the rose-alley, but Sir James, refusing to be ruffled, fell into step beside him.

"You are strangely changed, man," he said.

"Changed in estate indeed," said the Regent with dignity.

"I do not care *that* for your estate," said Sir James temperately. "But only for the man, who was once my friend."

"Well, *I* don't want to forget my old friends," protested the Regent. "Nobody can call me fickle, but the truth is that most of them have grown so poisonously sharp-tongued of late that I prefer other company. Even

you, who were once a gay enough campaigner, have turned so crabbit that when I see you coming from one end of a gallery I escape from the other."

"A bad business," agreed Sir James.

"Well, why need the men with good counsel be so grim, and why must the cheerful fellows bring me bad counsel just because of their cheerfulness?"

"It is easy to be pleasant, Moray, and more to a man's advantage," said Sir James dryly. "It is only those who care less for profit than for truth who will come to you with pills instead of comfits."

"Then let them dose themselves," said the Regent. "And I will have the comfits."

"Very well," shrugged Sir James. "And may they not turn your stomach."

They had come to the end of the rose-alley, which turned right towards the Palace and left towards the upward slope of the Canongate. The two men bowed stiffly.

"My way lies towards the Castle," said Sir James. "I have business with Kirkcaldy of Grange."

"Do not have too much, or it may be the worse for you," the Regent called after him.

Sir James made no sign of having heard, but set off towards the town, moving heavily, as if he had been disappointed by the interview, while the Regent, standing alone at the corner of the rose-alley, made a gesture as if he meant to call him back, then checking it, moved off the way he had come, back to the light-hearted flatterers who cared more for feathering their own nests than for the safety of their patron, for whom an assassin's bullet was already waiting.

But it was not to kill him just yet. The year went on, with factions still shifting and changing. Money came in from England for those who would use it

in the cause of dispeace, the Regent listened only to fair words, and men who hoped for the best but wished the Queen no ill, such as the Melville brothers and Kirkcaldy of Grange, stood bewildered among such quicksands.

The usual autumn Weapon-show for the citizens of Edinburgh was proclaimed at the Mercat Cross by the town-criers for the early morning of the last day of September, and significantly well attended. The drum which called citizens from their beds at four o'clock every morning was sent round the streets half an hour earlier that day, and four young men, bearing the banners for the four quarters of the town, made of white taffeta with the royal arms embroidered in black on one side and the Castle on the other, led the citizens, with pipers and drummers, past the town acres from which the crops had been mostly gathered, out by the peat moss to the windy stretches of the Boroughmuir. There in the frosty daybreak they awaited the inspection of the Provost and his bailies, grouped according to their crafts, while the paid musicians of Edinburgh paraded up and down the gossiping ranks, and the town guard waited with equanimity for the usual trouble to break out between the chronically embittered tailors and the furriers whom they accused of encroaching on their preserves by making garments trimmed with fur. The morning air was sharp and the men stood huddled in their plaids, their weapons laid out before them, chewing at the provisions which their wives had packed, while the sellers of pies, ale and sugar-sticks went hopefully from group to group.

Among the merchants, who held themselves apart from the common men of the crafts upon a knoll, stood Andrew Haliburton, wearing cloak and velvet bonnet, his two apprentices behind him, his hands crossed on the hilt of the sword on which he leaned. He looked older, uneasy and silent, as he waited with the rest, taking no part

in the cheerful thrust and parry of repartee which was usual on such occasions. The Provost, passing by, paused with a question.

"What news of your boy, Haliburton?"

Andrew Haliburton shook his head. "Little. He is not ill, and shaping, so my brother says, well enough."

"But that is fine news. What more would you hear, man?"

"I have heard that the Duke of Alva has set up his Council of Blood in Brussels, and that Philip of Spain will crush the heresy of Protestantism from the Netherlands if he has to massacre half of them that live there."

"But his agents would not dare lay hands on Scottish merchants," said the Provost, scandalised.

"Would they not?" said Andrew Haliburton. "When the courts of the Inquisition drip with the blood of even Englishmen, haled from their own ships?"

"Why, man, that's terrible," said one of the bailies.

"Terrible enough," said the merchant. "I sent him to Antwerp to escape from the troubles that seemed ready to come upon us, and I fear that I have only shaken him from the spit into the flames."

But the Provost clapped him encouragingly on the shoulder. "Keep up your heart, keep up your heart. You'll have him soon home. Is not the Queen safely bestowed in Loch Leven and the government in good hands till the King her son is grown? Tuts, man, our troubles are behind us."

"Indeed I should like to think so. But I fear some may still be in front," said Andrew Haliburton.

So it proved. For by the time summer came round again, the Queen had escaped from her prison, dashed off a renunciation of her abdication, and set every one once more in a flurry. Then the vacillation of the Regent produced the consequences which his wiser councillors had

foreseen, for the men whose support he had failed to win for his government turned willingly enough to the Queen. Others waited to see which way the wind would blow, among them that cultured, cynical agnostic, the Queen's one-time Secretary, Maitland of Lethington, who had loved her well enough, yet was in no haste to throw his cap over any windmill. And Kirkcaldy of Grange, beholden to no party, but entrusted with the safety of the Castle of Edinburgh, pulse of the capital, kept his charge close, set double guard, and had all men challenged at the gates.

The controversy, as Master Haliburton had foreseen, tore the very country apart. Neighbour turned against neighbour, brother against brother, father against son as King's men met Queen's men in the streets. The cleavage went even deeper than the religious disputes, and no one could tell where it might end.

Honest men's business was struck by the uncertainty of national affairs almost to a standstill. Only the lorimers and cutlers, the dag-makers and lock-makers plied their trades cheerfully in their usual whirl of sparks, as they tried and tempered blades, fashioned pistols and turned out the locks that citizens demanded for their houses and their chests.

Andrew Haliburton, like many another merchant, moved his family and his goods from Edinburgh to the port of Leith, and there waited with as much philosophy as might be for the coming of better times. Ships from the Netherlands brought occasional news from Walter, working in his uncle's house at Antwerp; but they brought other news as well, less welcome news of the ferocity of Alva and the taxes which were wringing the last penny of profit out of a man's dealings, so that shutters were going up daily in every street.

In Scotland, things were nearly as bad. Like most of

the merchants, Andrew Haliburton had no longer any patience with the Queen's cause, and grumbled at her dramatic doings all day in the dark and fish-smelling cellar in the mean street where he was compelled to stock his goods with only the sniffing Rob to help him, for Willy had run off to join the army of the Regent in time to take part in the rout of Langside and see the Queen ride off, with a few companions only, for the Border and the sanctuary of England, where she was to be so strangely received.

The Regent Moray followed her with an oddly assorted party which included such divers elements as the Bishop of Orkney (that same smooth-faced fox who had christened the infant James, yet married his mother to Bothwell not six months after), William Maitland of Lethington, Mary's one-time secretary (who may have hoped to restrain the Regent from a supreme piece of folly, or perhaps to further his own affairs) and George Buchanan, that scholar who had once written the Queen such exquisite verses, and was now preparing an impassioned volume of condemnation instead.

At all events, they rode urgently towards England, bitter-faced and wrangling among themselves as they carried their accusations to Queen Elizabeth. Behind them the torn country of Scotland seemed to take breath again, as if, delirious and exhausted, she glimpsed in that respite a mirage of the recovery which was as yet far off. For Kirkcaldy of Grange, sickened by the excesses of the Regent's party, which deposed and even sought to execute its ruler, still held the fortress of Edinburgh Castle forlornly for the Queen.

But round the battlements of the fortress of Stirling the young King's sentries tramped and peered and paused to scratch and spit and discuss their betters, while in the upper room of the square tower lay the child who was



their prisoner. The even progress of his days was marked out by the shuffling tramp of their feet, the clang of halberds grounded as they turned to pace back before the window; his waking consciousness was busy with the gleams which danced across the ceiling from steel blades in the sunshine outside. The grumble of soldiers' voices would break strangely into the black silence of his wakeful nights, through which one of his nurses snored, infinitely remote, on the far side of the cold hearth.

Whimpering a little, trembling with something he was too young even to know for fear, James Stuart waited for daylight through the long winter nights, while around him, unguessed at yet, the country of Scotland waited for its King.

*Part Two*

THE APPRENTICE

*"I sought to win all men's hearts."*

JAMES VI *Basilikon Doron.*



## CHAPTER SIX

JAMES HAD NO MEMORY of his first ride. The daily exercise on the fat and mincing piebald pony seemed always to have been part of his life. The pony, with its elaborately-gilded harness and scarlet and gold saddle-cloth, had been a present from his absent mother, sent with an impassioned greeting to her son. James's guardians did not transmit the greetings or bestow the kisses, but they kept the pony, which was a valuable little beast, and useful. James was perched on it before his uncertain legs had learned to carry him reliably about the big, bleak rooms of the Prince's Tower at Stirling Castle, where the Earl and Countess of Mar held him faithfully while chaos threatened the country again.

The Regent Moray was shot down by an old enemy when James was barely three. The ladies-in-waiting, the yawning ushers and chattering nurses, were warned not to mention death or violence in the child's hearing. But, as usual, the warning was disobeyed. By the time he was four James was sensitive enough to know himself to be the centre of wild and whirling whispers, and their half-heard terror was greater than cold truth could have been.

The great chambers of the tower set apart for him in the Castle seemed full of shadows and the talk of death, so the best moment of his day was always when they came to summon him for his ride. The rough kindly talk of the Master of the Stables was very comforting after the uneasy gossip of his bored attendants. Out in the pale northern sunshine or sharply tingling wind

he could forget the threatening quiet of his rooms. The nurses of his Household preferred to slip away down to the courtyard and giggle with the grooms instead of amusing the solemn child of four who was so ridiculously King of Scotland. This he knew from experience, also that there would be scoldings for him if he made his loneliness too loudly known. He must not betray the majesty of his position, they said, by bawling at shadows. So in a general way he did not bawl.

But one morning, left for hours alone, his mixed feelings of desolation became too strong for him. His eyes grew tragic and enormous; the tears that filled them overflowed. His face puckered. His mouth opened, shut, opened again. A roar escaped him, then another, then a series. His face turned crimson: he beat his hands on his knees and bounced up and down on the sheepskin rug which lay before the hearth. The noise brought the Countess herself in a hurry from her rooms below, icily furious at such a demonstration, and for the neglect which had caused it. She demolished the whimpering excuses of the nurse who had "meant nothing but to slip down to the buttery to inquire after the progress of the dinner for his Highness," and then turned inexorably to James.

"Princes, your Highness, do not weep."

James, who had in fact cried himself almost beyond the reach of admonition into a fit of hysterics, opened his mouth again. Fear, anger and hysteria contracted the weary muscles of his throat. The roar rose upwards from his lungs, gathered and quivered, was checked at the sight of the coldly aquiline face which seemed to grow larger and larger as it came near his own. The roar retreated. James shut his mouth again.

"Are you cold?"

James nodded, not because it was true, but because he

recognised the question as an opportunity to justify the unkingly yells of which the alarming lady of the Castle so much disapproved.

The Countess turned to the nurse, now sniffing as resentfully as she dared by the spinning-wheel in the window.

"Go to the door—and mind you go no farther—to tell the page in the corridor to run to the kitchen with orders for the serving man of his Highness's chamber. He is to bring up another basket of logs immediately."

"Yes, m'lady."

The young, bored under-nurse hurried out, to clap her hand over her mouth and stifle a giggle at the sight of the page of the upper corridor, who, equally bored, had relieved the tedium of blowing on cold fingers by trying how far he could walk along the stone-flagged stretch on his hands instead. At the sound of her steps he righted himself with a twist and a scuffle, and accepted her instructions with a grin of relief.

"Logs, and look sharp with them," said the young nurse.

"Come with me to find them, my pretty?" said the page, an arm extended for her waist. He was a well-grown boy, the down already dark along his upper lip, but the nurse pushed him away from her across the corridor. "If I'm outside that room two minutes my place at the Castle will be waiting for another. *She's* in one of her takings, I warn you."

"Then I'll be off," said the page. "Look at me, how I go." He turned a couple of neat cart-wheels and landed on his feet. "Go and teach your infant Highness to do that if you can."

On his sheepskin James was staring unblinkingly at Lady Mar out of the very large and very blue eyes which already held so much intelligence and so little expression.

His fingers were nervously twisting and untwisting the curls of the rug on which he sat cross-legged, his attention centred on the pinkish tip of her long nose, which twitched, as he had already found, when she was ill-tempered. It was twitching now, but he awaited developments with more interest than alarm. The Countess terrified him less at the moment than the shapeless things which threatened to come creeping out of the dark corners of the rooms in the tower when his nurse left him alone. The Countess was at least human, and he had already sensed that she was just and wise. He was reassured, too, by the formality with which she usually treated him. It meant nothing to be the King of Scotland, as his nurse sometimes crooned to him as he lay in bed at night, clamouring for songs that would send him into a quiet sleep unlit by violent dreams. But when the Countess called him "your Highness" and curtsied to him as she did when the Regent or one of his lords were present, he knew that it meant she would not presume to smack his face; at all events, not immediately afterwards.

"Is your Highness hungry?"

"Yes," said James, again from policy rather than conviction.

"I will have bread and honey brought before you go out for your ride."

James did not answer and the Countess shifted uneasily under his steady stare. James was merely noticing with interest the way her black brows came together above the bump on the bridge of her nose, but to the woman looking down on him his clear gaze seemed uncanny, thoughtful beyond his years.

"Does your Highness need anything else?" she asked in what she meant to be a kindly tone. For she was a conscientious woman, and anxious to carry out her task in every particular.

"Yes," said James.

The Countess puckered her brows at him and James watched the black line undulate in and out of the furrows. It amused him. He began to smile, while the Countess watched him, puzzled, the furrows deepening as she tried to imagine what his further needs could be.

"Perhaps," she said at last, "your Highness would like to ride a little earlier this morning?"

*Ride!* Here was a word that James knew. It was a pleasant word connected with the delicious excitement of bumping up and down on the pony's broad back, and seeing the sweat bead and trickle on the crimson face of the Master of the Stables as he ran beside his pony, holding it back as it tried to catch up its stable companion, ridden by Johnny Mar. The son of the Castle was a great lad nearly in his teens, already glorious with keen little spurs on his high riding boots, and allowed to gallop his pony all over the rough pasture, while James had still to endure a hand on his rein at a trot.

"Yes," said James. "I want to ride now."

"So you shall," said the Countess. "Send the page to the stables; find his Highness's outdoor clothes. Where is the head-nurse?"

"Abed with the toothache, m'lady," said the girl, who had already begun to rummage nervously among chests in the room beyond for James's cloak and cap.

"And the others?"

"Meg's drawing ale for his Highness's dinner at eleven, if you please, and Aby in the kitchen to seek his meat, and Mirren furbishing clothes in the linen room, m'lady. I was left here for the morning, till the dinner was past."

"Very well. Summon two gentlemen to escort his Highness. And see that the page takes a message to his



lordship. He said this morning that he wished to see what progress his Highness is making on horseback."

"Yes, m'lady." The young nurse, distracted from clasping James's equipment round him by the necessity of remembering the messages she was to deliver, began to flush and fluster. James himself remained calm, controlling his pleasure, because of some deep-seated instinct of which he was as yet scarcely aware, that if he sought anything too openly these people about him would, for that very reason, spirit that pleasure away.

So he stood quite still, stockish and awkward, lifting his arms reluctantly for the leather girdle to be passed round his waist, moving his head away from the clumsy fingers which fastened the strings of the velvet cap which was so absurdly like those which grown-up strangers doffed already in his presence, calling him "Highness" and "Majesty" before he knew the meaning of the words.

Bread and honey were brought, and James ate impatiently, moving from foot to foot on the sheep-skin rug while the nurse waited with a napkin ready to wipe his sticky fingers and escort him downstairs.

In the courtyard stood the piebald pony, and at the sight of it James so far forgot his dawning, dreadful caution as to twist his hand free from the ladies beside him and run unsteadily down the shallow steps to the waiting Master of the Stables, who stooped and held out his arms. His smile answered the boy's as he swung him high in the air before landing him carefully astride the high-pommelled, gaudy little saddle covered with scarlet morocco leather and dangling with gold fringe.

"There, my braw wee mannie, is that not better than the women and the nursery? Here's a fitter seat for a king than auld wives' knees, is it no'?"

James nodded, his stubby little hands fumbling for the scarlet reins, clumsy in the fanciful scented gloves into

which they had stuffed them. The gloves were French trifles, sent by his mother at heaven knew what cost, from her English prison. But this James had not been told, and he hated the things. As soon as they were safely out of the courtyard he held out his hands to the Master of the Stables, who responded with a cheerful wink as he pulled the ill-fitting gloves off and stuffed them in his pocket.

"Ye'll have to mind me to put them on ye afore we land ye back at the Castle," he warned. "Now, look ye, laddie, till I mind ye o' the reins. In between this finger and yon, so. Thumbs up, side by side, the wrist a wee thing easier. Leave his mouth free, now, ye'll ride no better for dragging the head off the beast. That's fine now, that's fine. Easy does it."

James sat up very straight, his legs, which were long for his size and not yet perfectly within his control, reaching downwards to push against the gaily decorated stirrups, heels down, toes up, as he had been told. Already he understood much of what they said to him, and he seldom had to be given instructions twice. "Eh, he has the head of a lad twice his age on these shilpit shoulders," said the Master of the Stables admiringly, as he watched James ride off down the steep incline which twisted round the side of the cliff on which the Castle stood, like that other Castle of Edinburgh in which he had been born. At the bottom of the cliff was the old tilting-ground, where they had held a great and knightly gathering for James's fifth birthday, a week past. The turf was still scored deeply by the hoofs of the charging horses, and pounded bare and dusty round the edges of the ground where the citizens of Stirling had pushed and shouldered each other behind restraining ropes for a better view of the quality at their blood-letting.

But the ground was empty as James walked his pony

sedately round it, turning to right and left as the Master of the Stables bade him, now by pulling on one rein, now on the other. A little group of men had collected at the far end of the field, but James was too busy to notice them as he brought his heels sharply against the pony's side as he had seen Johnny Mar do when he wanted to trot.

The pony set off with a snort. James rocked and clutched at the pommel, and his instructor made a grab at the rein.

"Let me go," said James shrilly. "I will go alone, I tell you, I *will* go alone."

The Master of the Stables, running by the little beast's side, unexpectedly put his foot into a hole gouged out for the flagstaff at the tilting. He plunged forward on his face, his fingers giving one convulsive snatch at the rein which merely jerked the spirited pony's mouth and made it swerve with a sudden violence which might have been too much for a child of twice his age.

It entirely unseated James. The sky, where white galleons of summer cloud towered in an infinite blue, the black, harsh old rock topped by the Castle of Stirling, all whirled slowly round. He had a fleeting glimpse of the pony's piebald belly almost above him: a hoof ruffled his hair and something hit him in the back, hard enough to knock all the breath out of him. He lay where he had fallen, opening and shutting his mouth with the desperation of a fish stranded on a grassy bank, while a circle of awed faces suddenly surrounded him, shutting out the lovely quiet of the sky.

James, whose breath was coming back to him, noticed that all these bearded faces seemed curiously alike. Every mouth was open, rounded to a close circle of consternation. It came to him that their agitation was caused by his fall. This was strange, for when Johnny Mar, growing

too adventurous, had turned an accidental somersault only two days before, every one had laughed. What, then, was the difference between him and Johnny Mar? He was turning the question over when one of the men above him knelt down and spoke. James could see the blue sky again in the gap of the circle where his head had been.

"Lad, lad, can you speak?" said the gentle, strangely shaken voice of the Earl of Mar.

James considered the question for a full minute. It seemed to him remarkably absurd. He had been able to speak, as the Earl knew, from their various courtly conversations with each other, for quite a long time now. What then was the matter with the Earl that he should suddenly ask such a question? Still, he appeared to require an answer, for the long, aristocratic face close above him was blanched to the colour of a duck's egg, and the nervous mouth was working under the fine silvered moustache.

"Can you speak to me?" he repeated.

"Yes," said James tolerantly.

"There's no bones broken?" inquired some one else.

The Earl of Mar began to feel up and down James's legs and arms, and to prod at his doublet with those thin fingers which always seemed readier with a quill than with his weapons. The sensation made James giggle. He kicked out and caught one of the gentlemen on the shin. All the others laughed, in a sudden roar which frightened James a little, since he did not recognise it for overwhelming relief.

"I want to get on again," said James, when the sound had died down.

"A very proper spirit," said a dry voice on the edge of the group. "Let us hope that he will take his reverses in the world of letters as well."

"I have no doubt but that he will, Master Buchanan,

with you to guide him," said the Earl of Mar, with his mild, courteous smile, the smile which made many people underestimate his strength until they came up against that streak of quiet resolution which made him inaccessible to bribery or threats. James's mother, who did so many unwise things, had at least chosen well when she put her son in the charge of the Earl of Mar. James liked him.

"No harm done, eh?" said one of the strangers.

"Where's my pony?" demanded James.

They all laughed once more. But the little piebald was led up, and James perched in the saddle again, with the reins held as he had been told to hold them, and his doublet batched with dried mud. The Master of the Stables, limping and downcast, led him away from the group of illustrious men in silence and at a walk. It was only when they had reached the far end of the tilting-ground that he turned to grin up at the solemn James.

"Never was a rider made that didn't take a toss first," he said, encouragingly.

"Then I shall be a rider now," said James with decision.

"That you will," said the Master of the Stables. "I never had a bairn through my hands that made a better shape."

"Not Johnny Mar?" said James.

"Not he," lied the Master of the Stables. "Ye'll make two of him once you're used with the ways of it. Aye, lad, that's it. Down wi' the heels, mind, and up with the head while we ride past their lordships there."

"I want to trot," said James, drumming with his heels.

The Earl of Mar made a sudden movement, then checked himself. The Master of the Stables kept a firm grip of the reins and broke into a hirpling run. The little piebald set off, its well-shod hooves flickering in the sunshine, and James, crimson-faced and proud, bounced round the

field and back past the watching group. His under-lip was thrust out and his bonnet askew, but he held the reins in both hands and resisted the temptation to clutch at the pommel again. He trotted on, occasionally managing to time his rise and avoid a bumping, but not often. At last the Master of the Stables, running beside him, called a halt.

"Eh, lad, ye'll hae to let me get my breath. I'm all but used up with the exertion." He paused to mop his face with his sleeve, while James, breathless and exhausted himself, sat triumphantly straight and waved his hand gaily towards the Earl of Mar.

The lords came towards him across the grass, which was not what James had intended, but he watched them as they came with a new, shrewdly unchildlike interest. He disliked the groups of grave-faced men who tended to come into his rooms and mumble to each other while they stared at him. They had stared again to-day, but differently. They had been afraid. They were still afraid; because he had fallen. What did that fear mean?

He continued to wonder as they gathered round him, and to watch their faces in the hope of finding out. But they were calm again. They had forgotten. Perhaps if he were to fall again he would find out more about their fear, whether it was useful that they should be afraid, and if so, how he could use it. Was it worth falling off again to find out? James remembered the dizzily wheeling world, the hardness of the ground, and thought not.

The Earl of Mar brought one of the strangers up to James's saddle-bow. He was a slight man, not as tall or as straight as the Earl, with a long face and a wispy beard, tired eyes with creases round them, and thin hands.

"The time has come for us to think of study, your Highness," said the Earl. "And Master Buchanan here,

who knows all there is to know in the world, or thereabouts, is come to teach you."

James looked sidelong at the stooping stranger. "What will he teach me?" he inquired uneasily.

"All that a king should know, your Highness," said the Earl. "Eh, Master Buchanan?"

Master Buchanan looked temperately at his prospective pupil. "I can hardly promise ye that, my lord, though I will undertake to teach him all that a king can learn."

"I hope they may prove the same thing," said the kindly Earl of Mar. "Well, well, the sooner ye make a start the farther ye'll be on the road by nightfall. What time does his Highness dine?"

"At eleven, my lord," said one of the gentlemen in attendance.

"Let him dine, then. And afterwards Master Buchanan shall begin his education in the great chamber at the top of the tower. There they will be free from interruption. See that everything is ready, a fire kindled, table and stools set out, parchments and quills—what else will ye need, Master Buchanan?"

"Ink, my lord, if you please," said George Buchanan dryly. "There will be as much ink spilt as tears shed in that chamber, I'll warrant."

James looked alarmed, but the attendant circle grinned, while the Earl shook a reproving head at the graphic gesture of birching sketched by one of the younger lords behind James's back. "Then there shall be ink as well," he ordered. "And see here, Graham, there is no need to carry the tale of his Highness's tumble back to the Castle. It would set the Countess and her ladies in a turmoil, for fear of his precious life endangered."

"It shall be forgotten, my lord," said the gentleman obediently, though he fully intended to enliven the service of dinner at the second table in the Great Hall by

an embellished account of James's somersault and the consternation among his betters of the Council.

"If it is indeed to be forgotten," commented Master Buchanan dryly, "it might be as well to rub the dirt from the lad's shoulders for fear the women get the fancy that the very earth was malicious enough to rise up and strike him."

James gripped the reins steadfastly, and watched his new tutor with attention as the attendants scrubbed at his clothes. Young he might be, but he was already warily conscious of the impact of an alien, probably hostile personality. There was mockery in the scholar's narrow eyes, independence in the carriage of the head, and obstinacy as well as shrewdness in the set of the mouth and jaw. At five years old, James was as unaware of these several things as he was of Master Buchanan's international reputation for learning, or of the invitation from the Council which had brought him from the duties of Principal of St. Leonard's College in the University of St. Andrews to superintend the education of the carefully guarded young King. But something he could not name struck coldly at him from the personality of the stranger, of whom he knew nothing, as he knew nothing of the early days when Mary, his mother, just over from France, summoned Buchanan to the Palace of Holyrood to talk of the country they both loved, and read the words of the suave old Latin authors together. He did not know Buchanan for a member of the house of Lennox to which his unfortunate father, Darnley, had belonged, and so he was without a clue to the scholar's later bitterness. Astride his pony on that summer morning, his eyes level with George Buchanan's, he only knew, strangely, as children know these things, that for some reason this man disliked him already, that he must, for his own advantage, seek to change his heart.



Master Buchanan looked heavily at James, his long nose, drooping moustaches and sagging jowls giving him an odd air of one of the great hounds kept about the Castle. James saw the likeness suddenly, and was comforted by it. He liked hounds. Surely he would be able to like this man and make himself also liked. It was warm and comfortable when people liked him, chilly and frightening when they did not.

Thinking of the hound, holding out a tentative hand as he might have done to a strange beast, he smiled at George Buchanan. His pale, sharp-featured child's face was changed for an instant, held in its immature curves the ghost of another face, a gay and lovely face which it did not in the least resemble, so that it raised a memory which struck the scholar out of his composure. Buchanan stared, pale eyes widening, at the child on the gaudily tricked-out pony, then, with a muttered explanation that he had work to prepare for the afternoon's study, he turned and left the group, plodding away from them across the rough meadow grass with his head bent and his hands thrust out of sight into the wide sleeves of his gown.

"Now then, your Highness, you must also return for dinner," said the Earl of Mar. "Since you have weighty affairs to deal with afterwards. See that he rides quietly back, will you?" he added in an undertone. "We must have no further adventures."

"He shall ride quietly, my lord," said the Master of the Stables. He took the scented gloves from his pocket as they left the field, the gentlemen in attendance and the escort of men-at-arms trailing after them, the lords, deep in consultation, strolling behind.

"We'll just stop for a wee while by the wall till we get these on again," said the Master of the Stables. "The fingers, there . . . what fiddly things they are. Mercy on

us, who but women would have thought of so many strings and tassels for a man to tangle himself up with? There, it's done now. Up wi' the reins, afore my lord comes by. That's the way. Elbows tight to your sides, mind. Heid up. Heels down. That's the way for a king to ride. Aye, that's the way. That's fine."

The pony's little hooves tittupped over the cobbles, rang louder as they passed under the archway of the lower gate, that postern through which James's grandfather, the Common People's King, as they called him, had slipped out in disguise. James had heard the story from one of his nurses, and it had taken his fancy. So even kings sometimes escaped, did they? Little as he knew of kingship, the thought was a comfort, since so far kingship seemed to mean being shut up alone in rooms with bars on the windows and nurses to watch every movement, instead of being allowed to fight and tumble in the sunshine, like the children of the men-at-arms who were shooed out of the married quarters to squabble by the main gate.

And now came this business of learning. James brooded over it, in the mature way of a child solitary among grown-ups, who knows too much of adult speech at the age when most of his contemporaries are still preoccupied with infantile affairs. He bolted his dinner unwillingly, turning his head away from the gobbets of meat they offered him on the point of a knife, because when he was nervous his throat seemed to constrict, as it had constricted now, so that he could scarcely swallow. He stuffed half-chewed morsels of gristle into his cheek till it bulged, and waited for an opportunity to spit them secretly out among the rushes when his attendants were occupied with preparing the next dish. Even the bread dipped into rich red gravy was difficult to swallow: his face wrinkled with disgust as they held other pieces in

front of his mouth, making first encouraging and then exasperated noises.

At last it was over. They wiped the trickle of gravy from his chin and held the tankard of ale for him to take a final sip. His hands were washed, his doublet was changed, his hair sleeked back. The Countess of Mar herself came to take him by the hand up the cold stone stairs to the upper chamber where Master Buchanan stood by the window, mending a quill pen.

"Here is his Highness, Master Buchanan," said Lady Mar, stiffening her arm against the sudden backward drag of James's whole weight, as he hung back like a nervous young animal from something new and strange.

"Let him sit down at the table," said George Buchanan in an abstracted tone. "I shall be ready for him presently."

The Countess's head went up. Here was arrogance. The man was a penniless scholar, as every one knew, and he presumed to give orders as if she had been a mere nursery slut.

"Be good enough to come and look after your pupil at once, Master Buchanan," she said sharply. "My time is not for ever at your service."

George Buchanan turned round then, mildly surprised, the knife he was about to restore to its sheath at his belt arrested midway and sending a glint of reflected sunshine dancing over his shabby clothes. "Indeed, I will come willingly enough," he said. "I am already engaged on his affairs." He crossed the room and laid the quill on the table before lifting James over the bench to sit in front of a horn-book, a number of sheets of parchment, and two or three squat volumes, their leather binding shabby and stained, as if from much service.

"These are the books that served me well when I taught the lads of the Scottish nation in the great city of Paris," said Master Buchanan, seating himself at the high chair

at the end of the table and indicating to the sternly waiting Countess that her vigilance was no longer required. James heard the affronted swirl of her skirts with something like despair as she left him alone with his master. He was not so much afraid of the man as afraid of the dislike which he already felt as strongly as he felt the effort his master was making to hold it under control.

George Buchanan was a just man, and he meant honestly to do his best by his new pupil. He picked up the horn-book and began to indicate the letters, and to show how they were grouped, lower down, to form the words of prayers, both in Latin and Scots.

"I would have you learn to read Latin," explained Master Buchanan, slowly and deliberately, "even before you learn to read Scots."

James fixed his large eyes on the movements of his master's moustaches, as he had once fixed them on the wagging beard of Master Knox, and allowed the words to stream over him unimpeded. Master Buchanan had never taught so young a pupil, and was not yet aware of the limitations of a child of five. James's grave air of attention beguiled him into the belief that he was being understood, and his eloquence grew impassioned, as if a whole hall full of students was before him.

From the Latin of the horn-book he passed to the living virtues of the Latin tongue itself, that language which scholarship was spreading over the world, so that men from Scotland, Germany, France, England and Italy could speak to each other in the University of Paris in a language which all understood.

The time was not far off, said Master Buchanan, when the individual language of each country would be forgotten, and with them the differences which set men at war. The scholar, with his Latin, would revoke the doom of Babel, and set men side by side in peace which

would transcend the boundaries of nationality, of sect and creed. He, James, would grow up into a new world, and it would be his task, as a king in it, to further the comradeship of man, the triumph of learning. A king should be the most learned clerk in his country. It was the duty of George Buchanan to make James the wisest man in Scotland. Thus he would set about it.

It was something like an hour later when the Earl of Mar quietly opened the door and stood thoughtfully just within it. Master Buchanan, fairly launched on the subject nearest to his heart, was standing up at the head of the table, declaiming superbly to an unseen audience, his thin hands occasionally clenched and pounding on the table, or raised in a dramatic gesture above his head, forgetful of his solitary pupil, who crouched on the bench, whey-faced, his eyes half out of his head.

"Er—Master Buchanan," said the Earl tentatively.

The Principal of the College of St. Leonard brought himself unwillingly back to earth. "Yes, yes? What is it? Ah, it is you, my lord. You wish to speak to me?"

The Earl strolled forward and seated himself on the edge of the table, with one foot on the form. He also reached out to lay a kindly hand on James's hunched shoulder. "I was about to suggest, Master Buchanan, that you let his Highness off somewhat lightly, on his first day of study."

"Willingly, willingly," said George Buchanan. "He is a good, quiet pupil. I have been giving him a lecture on general scholarship, so that he will afterwards have some conception of what we seek to instil with all our Latin and Greek."

"Er—yes," said the Earl, masking a smile. "Indeed. That is ambitious, is it not?"

"Why so? He must have some comprehension of his objective. He has listened with attention, and no doubt

gained much. Come now, boy, repeat to me a little, as simply as you like, of what I have been telling you this last hour."

James lifted enormous eyes to his tutor's face, then let them roll towards the compassionate smile of the Earl of Mar. Out of the fog of weariness and fright Master Buchanan's questioning eyes bored at him. He had only the slightest idea what his master wanted, he had sat with his back to a large log fire for over an hour, after eating unwillingly in haste and panic. He was only five, and he had been talked at like a roomful of students in their teens. It all became suddenly too much for him. He felt very queer. He put a hand to his head, then slid limply sideways from his bench on to the rushes, while the Earl stooped, too late, to catch him as he fell.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

THE EARL OF MAR had some difficulty in explaining to an honestly bewildered professor that his teaching had been perhaps a little overwhelming for a nervous child.

"Overwhelming? I?" said George Buchanan.

The Earl indicated that it might perhaps lighten the burden of learning if his pupil had companions.

And so it was arranged. Master Buchanan became tutor, not only to James, but to four young nobles, all older than their King, but with something less than his aptitude. For while they learned grudgingly, wishing themselves free for manlier pursuits, and whispering together as much as they dared, James learned avidly, and with a sort of terrorised facility. Master Buchanan, bent on making the King of Scotland a credit to his master, spared no pains and showed no mercy. Young Johnny Mar, who would have preferred to hang about the stables with his father's grooms, made heavy weather with his Latin. Willie Murray, and the other two lads, aged seven, eight and six to James's five, pursued a campaign of passive resistance which infuriated Master Buchanan till he fairly cracked their stupid heads together and stamped out of the room in search of a rod.

But James, absorbing information every hour, and growing all to knees and elbows, had not at first sufficient energy to spare to give his master much trouble. Their time-table was strenuous, for they were all at their books by seven of a morning, kneeling first for prayer, then learning Greek and Latin verbs for an hour before the morning meal. Classical and modern Scottish history,

which always made Master Buchanan angry, took up the time till dinner at eleven. After dinner the piebald pony was brought round to the courtyard, and James, half dazed, would scramble thankfully on its back, reviving a little in the light wind which came down from the encircling hills. Lessons did not begin again, with composition and arithmetic, till one o'clock had struck on the only clock in the Castle, over the Parliament Hall. So the other boys scattered rowdily to their various pursuits, pausing sometimes to yell obscurely insulting comments at the stiff little figure of James on horseback, and then run before the Master of the Stables could catch them at it.

James knew that they laughed at him among themselves, mocking him because of his gravity and sedate ways. The knowledge made him graver and still more sedate, except when in the company of Johnny Mar, a cheerful, sturdy young lout who was always kind to the clever little oddity whom neither he nor any of the other boys could seriously consider their King. It was Johnny Mar who cuffed aside the occasional attempts at bullying which were apt to crop up when Master Buchanan was out of the room. But it was James who swiftly worked out Johnny Mar's sums for him when he was faced with a birching, and James who invented the nicknames which made young Lord Invertyle into "Simple Sandy" and Johnny Mar into "Jock o' the Sclaites."

One way and another there was a good deal of back-chat and bawdy joking between bouts of instruction, cheerful interchanges in which James soon learned to take his part. He was not unhappy. Companionship did something to reduce his fear of Master Buchanan, though he never lost his original impression of Buchanan's contemptuous dislike.

Shut away in Stirling Castle, James knew nothing of



what went on outside its walls, and the outside world knew less of him. Strange rumours went up and down the still distracted country. The King, some said, was a monster, others a girl dressed in boy's clothes for greater security. He had a dozen fingers. He had the hooves of a beast; he was marred with the fire of St. Anthony; he could not stand on his legs. He was daft; he was dead, and they had set up a changeling at Stirling in his place.

Sober men, distressed by the murder of the Regent Moray, and doubtful of the ability of the elderly Earl of Lennox, next Regent in his stead, shook their heads over such talk, since in the person of its young King lay the only apparent hope of ever achieving any sort of stable government again. So rumours of his oddity were dangers both to the country's future and his own.

James's guardians, too, realised the necessity for reassuring the people. It was not enough to keep the King in safe custody: as many people as possible must see their King, not as a monster or a weakling, but as a thin, nervous but entirely normal small boy. So in August, a couple of months after his fifth birthday, James was given a speech to learn by rote. This caused him no trouble, but he disliked the weight of the robes they fastened to his shoulders, and the firm, hard clasp of Lady Mar's hand as she led him into the Parliament House at Stirling in his best doublet and the scarlet hose which wrinkled on his slight shanks as he made his first appearance before his assembled Parliament. The Earl of Morton, that secret, sandy creature whom James already disliked, was close behind him, the foremost of the lords who supported the great weight of the robe royal as it trailed from James's shoulders. It was Morton, too, who attempted to lift him on to the seat of the great chair behind the table. But at the first pressure

of the unfamiliar hands about him James twitched them off.

"Let be," he said clearly. "I can get up myself."

Among the craning ranks of the assembled Parliament, hands were moved to hide smiles, and a sort of glimmer of mirth lightened the solemnity of the occasion.

James scrambled successfully on to the seat of the high-backed, fantastically carved chair, and glanced round him. He was more interested than alarmed. Well-known faces were round him: the Countess of Mar, watching him sharply; the Earl of Mar, smiling; the Earl of Lennox, who was his grandfather. He had a speech to make about him presently. On the other side, the red beard of the Earl of Morton, who had withdrawn a little, huffed, was caught in a shaft of August sunshine. In front of him the broad table was set out with quills, ink-horns, papers and sand. It looked much as his own table in the tower did at lesson-time.

James stared round him into the dimness of the great hall, trying to trace the echoes which answered the deep voice of the man who was delivering an address of welcome on behalf of his subjects, promising loyalty to his King in tones which seemed to come now from the gaping jaws of a carved lion at the head of a pillar, now from the figure of a man in stone near the opposite wall. James frowned as he tried to trace the sound. The sense escaped him entirely. At last the voice stopped. There was an utter silence. James shifted uneasily on the velvet cushion of the chair of state. His dangling legs were stabbed with pins and needles. All the eyes in the hall seemed fastened on him. It was frightening. Then his attention was distracted by the irresponsible flight of a butterfly which had contrived to find its way into the hall from the courtyard outside and was flickering across a slanting beam of sunlight.

The Earl of Mar leaned towards him. "Let us have that piece you learned by heart yesterday," he suggested kindly. "As loud as you can shout."

James nodded. He would say his piece willingly, if the Earl wished him to say it. The Earl had been good to him: he should not be disappointed. But meanwhile he was absorbed in watching the flight of the butterfly. Would it light on one of the grey heads ranked in front or would it flutter out again?

The Earl of Morton made an impatient movement. He was uneasy and irascible. This comedy were better finished. He leant across behind James and whispered fretfully to the Earl of Mar, "Well, has the brat forgotten it already?"

James heard that. He turned from contemplation of the butterfly to stare full at the Earl of Morton, his wide eyes apparently expressionless, yet missing nothing.

"No," said the Earl of Mar softly, "he has not forgotten, nor, I fancy, will he forget these words of yours."

"Bah," said the Earl of Morton, who disliked all children and precocious, royal children more than most.

He moved irritably away, while the Earl of Mar, smiling at his ward, helped him to his feet and reassuringly whispered to him the first words of his speech.

James, standing on the seat of the chair of state, drew in a deep breath. Recitation had no terrors for him: his retentive memory, his early curiosity over the strange shapes and sounds of words made it an easy matter to remember and declaim verses which would have kept Johnny Mar mumbling for hours, fingers in ears and eyes screwed shut.

The Parliament House was crowded. To the very back of the hall clustered the leaders of his subjects. Some few in front sat on stools, with documents in their hands. The majority stood, shouldering each other aside for a

better view. James saw an agitated vista of grizzled beards and broad shoulders, the plumes and brooches of the Highlanders contrasting with the sober cloth of the city Provosts and the leather jerkins of the soldiers. He was pleased, rather than intimidated, by the sight of so many grown men standing in silence to listen to him. As he began to speak, he remembered the way the other speaker's voice had echoed from the mouth of the carved lion, and strained his own voice to its utmost in the hope that he might raise an echo too.

"My lords and gentlemen," cried James, and his high, unsteady young voice sounded forlorn and shrill in that place of grave debate, "we are convened here, as I understand, to do—to do justice. And because my age will not suffer me to do my charge by myself, I have given my power to my grandfather as Regent, and to you, to do as—as——" His eyes wandered: the butterfly was escaping through the archway into the sunshine outside.

"As ye shall answer . . ." prompted the Earl of Mar.

"As ye shall answer to God and me hereafter."

"That's it, that's fine. Now here's a cushion to raise you a bit. Sit behind this table and watch the Parliament debate."

The Earl helped James to settle himself again on the high-backed chair, propped up by extra cushions secured with gold cords so that they should not slither when he lolled, weary with proceedings in which he seemed to have no further share.

James yawned. The debate was very long and very dull. Nobody paid any more attention to him. He patted the carved wooden lions which crouched along the arms of his chair, and was just about to climb off it to inspect the strange animals entwined to make a foot-rest when the Countess of Mar plucked

him up again, tweaked the purple robe straight on his shoulders, and warned him against further fidgeting. James sat still after that for what seemed interminable hours. At least, he believed himself to be sitting still, though to that iron disciplinarian, the Countess of Mar, the continual flicker of restless movement which kept him, like any other young creature, everlastingly fiddling with cords or velvets, the strings of his shoes or the brooch at his shoulder, was a source of intense irritation. In the presence of the nobility of Scotland she could hardly scold, and James, with the uncanny instinct of children, seemed to know that she could not venture further, in that august company, than the little frowns and rappings which he disdained.

At last he could keep silent no longer.

"How long must I stay here?" he whispered.

"Hush," said the Countess of Mar.

"But how *long*?" persisted James more loudly.

"Till the debate is finished."

"I want my dinner."

"You shall have it, all in good time."

"Good time, what is good time? I call this a very bad time, since it never seems likely to end. What can I do to make it pass?"

"Listen attentively, your Highness. Grave matters are being discussed. Try to understand them."

"Master Buchanan," declared James, "says they are beyond my understanding, and that I would be better at my books. I wish I were at my books. It isn't as wearisome as sitting so long in this place."

"Look about you, your Highness, if you cannot listen. There are many great and noble carvings in stone to admire." The Countess turned her shoulder to her charge and pursed her lips at the Earl, who was trying to hide a smile behind his moustaches. But he could not hide

the way the little sunray creases deepened at the corners of his eyes, and James saw them. If the Earl was smiling, the Countess might scold as she pleased.

He smiled across at the Earl, impudently, in face of the Countess's shaken head, then threw himself back in his great chair and stared at the roof. It disappeared into dimness, through which he could catch glimpses of jutting beams, touched here and there with gilt and scarlet. The windows were narrow, and spiders' webs wagged across them. Over his head was a canopy of brocade, fringed and tasselled, which had once been sumptuous, with its burden of gold thread and its elaborate design.

But time had loaded it with dust, and moth and mice had worked their way on it. It was dingy now, and directly over his head was a rent, where the rotten old stuff had been pierced by one of the corner-poles when it was too hastily taken from its place of storage and set up for this royal occasion.

James was fascinated by that rent: it was such a new rent for such old cloth. At the edges where the brocade had been torn away, he could catch glimpses of the original scarlet and blue, with untarnished fragments of gold threads emerging from the dusty overlay of drably faded stuff. He wished he were near enough to poke his fingers in it. He twisted himself round till he could see the corner of a window through it. Then he tried to attract the attention of the Countess of Mar.

But she turned away from him and seemed not to hear his whispers. James, not to be ignored, took hold of the sleeve of her gown and tugged it sharply. Then indeed, the Countess looked at him, her black brows meeting as she frowned.

James smiled apprehensively, trying to placate her by a reasonable inquiry.

"What is this place?" he asked. He had forgotten to

whisper, and his voice rang clearly through the silence of a pause in the proceedings.

"This is the Parliament of Scotland, your Highness," answered Lady Mar.

"Oh," said James. His eyes wandered back to the rent in the canopy "Then," he said dreamily, "it is a Parliament with a hole in it."

A sort of rustle of amusement ran over the solemn assembly, while those who had not heard him demanded what he had said from those who had. The Earl of Morton was heard to mutter something about bairns being kept where they would not interfere with the business of grown men, and the Earl of Lennox, presiding over the debate, withdrew his attention from an important document to shake his finger at his grandson, who seemed innocently surprised at the sensation his remark had caused.

But it caused still more sensation a few days later, when the Queen's men, defending Edinburgh Castle, led by Kirkcaldy of Grange, rode out of Edinburgh and attacked Stirling by night in hope of taking prisoner the heads of the King's party assembled for the Parliament. They were guided into the town between the night watches, so that the first alarm was given by the butt ends of their pikes as they thundered down the doors of the houses where the great lords were lodged. Panic spread. The Castle was soon awake, and James, roused from a nightmare to the reality of shouting men who clashed, fully armed, below his chamber window on their way to the main gate, sat up in bed, trembling at first, then rigid with greater fear.

The first cool light of the summer morning was not far off, but torches were hastily kindled, while flares leaped ten feet high from the Castle battlements to warn its defenders of attack.

The royal nurses, roused from their beds, huddled in shawls by the barred windows of James's sleeping chamber which overlooked the steep streets of the town, forgetting him altogether as they pointed excitedly to the medley below.

"The Queen's men have taken the town!"

"Aye, there goes the Earl of Huntly. . . ."

"Where?"

"There by the Cross, with his drawn sword above his head."

"And yonder's the Laird of Buccleuch—the Borderers are here as well. Eh, we may all look for short shrift."

"Tuts, they'll be too busy with seeking what gear they can get——"

"Mercy, but these Borderers run a man through or string him up as soon as bid him god-speed. I have that from the page of the upper corridor, whose brother served the Earl of Bothwell."

"What if they are in the Castle already?"

"They may be on their way up the stair!"

"Oh. . . ."

The nurses clutched each other and wept. Their wails mounted to a shriek as the great latch of the chamber door rattled, then lifted

"They've come. . . ."

The terrorised women fell back against the window-bars, their white faces streaked with tears, and flare-lit from the pandemonium below, their eyes fixed on the lifting latch and the opening door, their sobbing breath the only sound in the room.

The heavy door opened deliberately. Into the room stepped the tall Countess of Mar, fully dressed, even to the kerchief over her hair, her face stern, and a pricket of wax in her hand.

"What does this mean?" she asked.



They gaped at her.

"The—Queen's men——" some one at last contrived to falter, as the Countess waited, inflexible, for her answer. "They have taken the town . . . they are in the Castle by now . . . the Borderers are with them . . . we shall all be murdered. . . ."

"Be quiet," said the Countess harshly, as the sniffing chorus broke out again. "Go to your rooms beyond, and back to bed. This is nothing but an impudent raid which will presently be punished. The Castle is in no danger."

"But—we saw——" faltered the boldest of the nurses.

"*Be quiet,*" commanded the Countess again, raising her voice for the first time. "And go. What I have to say to you regarding the neglect of his Highness for your own foolish terrors will be said in the morning. I will stay with him now. I dare trust none of you."

She watched them file out before her, and shut the door on their heels. Then she walked deliberately across the room in search of a stand for her taper, paying no attention to the small tense figure of James, bolt upright in his gold and crimson brocade-hung bed, his fists clenched, his face gaunt with terror too sharp for tears or cries or any protest. The Countess passed him without a second glance. Deliberately she crouched on the white sheepskin rug, pushed two faintly glowing embers together, with a charred fragment of stick above them, and blew till a flame came. Then, still without comment, she fed the flame with little bits of stick, and unburned ends of log, till the flicker grew to a blaze, behind which the darkness retreated, and the terror with it.

James watched her, the rigidity of his whole figure yielding a little to the blessed reassurance of commonplace things. At last he spoke.

"You've soiled your hands."

The Countess smiled at him suddenly. James did not remember seeing her smile like that before. She was smiling now because the terrified little King had suddenly reminded her of her own Johnny, years before, when he had yelled for her to save him from a nightmare. Johnny was too big to need her now, but in James's panic the cold, self-possessed woman seemed for an instant to recapture the deliciously dependent babyhood of her sturdy son. James looked at her in astonishment. She was a cold and frightening person in the day time. It was strange that she should be so kind in the middle of the night.

"Light the candles now," he said, anxious to dispel the last fearfulness of the room, and to dismiss with it all knowledge of what was going on outside.

But the Countess shook her head. "Best not," she said. "We do not wish to make ourselves targets for the rabble in the streets.

"Then—then we *are* attacked?" faltered James.

The Countess shrugged. She left the fire and came to sit on the edge of James's bed. She even put one arm round him, drawing him against her shoulder with hard fingers which hurt when he resisted.

"Hush now, Jamie," she said. (By day she called him "Highness," James thought. This sounded kindlier.) "There is some fighting in the streets. But such things are common enough. It is only fearful because it has come at night. I have been through many worse."

"They—talked of men—within the Castle—coming to kill us," said James with difficulty.

"They are very foolish women. See." She swung back the bedclothes and picked James easily up in her arms, with a corner of her cloak round him. It was lined with fur, and tickled. But when he wriggled Lady Mar only

held him tighter, till they were standing by the side of the window, deep in shadow, and out of the way of any random shots.

"Look down," said the Countess, jerking her head towards the great gateway of the Castle. "There goes the Earl, with a party of musketeers. They are winding up the portcullis of the side gate for him. Now they are unbarring the door. Now the farther portcullis. They are through, and his men are running down the hill behind him. D'you see them?"

"Yes," said James. There was something much less terrifying in the ordered rush of these men with their muskets than in the glint of sharp points of steel, the sight of which seemed to enter his own body with a pang, a strange pang indeed, for in all his five years no one had as much as scratched his skin. How was it then, that the sight of an edged blade brought him such a turmoil of fear and pain, such pictures of crimson, streaming flesh, such rage and grief? He did not know why even the mention of the sword brandished by the Earl of Huntly had stiffened him into terror, nor why, at the sight of the steadily trotting musketeers who would scatter the swordsmen his spirits began to rise. James, too young to be precisely aware of his sensations, clapped his hands, and laughed as he watched the Earl's men advance on the groups of men who were trying to pinion the half-dressed citizens whom they had dragged from their beds.

As the first volley whistled over their heads, the groups wavered and broke. In the thinning dimness of the summer's morning the stampede continued, while the noise of horses' hoofs, the shouts of soldiers rounding up the invading company, and the rattle of musketry, came up to the watchers by the window.

"They have got at the stables," said the Countess in

exasperation. "Trust the Border thieves to steal at least a new mount for themselves."

"My pony!" said James in horror.

The Countess laughed. "You will find him safe enough," she said. "He would not carry a grown man far. They are running already. See them go, out of the town now, and scouring away across the plain. You can go to sleep again in peace, your Highness."

"Jamie," said the child drowsily.

"Jamie, then."

She carried him back to his elaborate bed, and laid him, unprotesting, between the sheets again. He was vaguely conscious of the comforting firm hands which drew the covers close about the back of his neck, rested on his shoulders with little patting reassurances. He grabbed one hand before Lady Mar could withdraw it, and held it between both his own. The Countess let it lie.

"Sleep," she said.

"Oh, no," said James. "I could not. I——" But his eyelids were falling already. Slowly he raised them again.

"Sing to me—like those women do," he commanded.

"I have a voice to keep one from sleep," said Lady Mar gravely, "not to bring it."

"Oh," said James. "Then stay beside me."

"Very well," said the Countess of Mar.

So she sat, upright and motionless on the edge of the big bed, watching the swallows whicker to and fro, the first sunlight dusty on their wings, while James, curled immediately into confiding sleep, forgot her. In the streets below the Castle the causeway was still deeply in shadow between the narrow houses, strewn with weapons, and gouted here and there with blood.

The Countess heard the soldiers come back, talking noisily. Her husband's worried voice rose up from the

courtyard below, giving orders to a bearing-party. She did not know that the man who lay, gasping, on the door which had been wrenched from its hinges to carry him was the Regent Lennox himself, dying of a pistol wound.

But the citizens, who had all been roused by the commotion, stood at their doors to watch the procession pass. And those who had heard of James's remark in the Parliament House a few days before jerked their heads towards the tower in the Castle where he slept and told each other that the young King had already the gift of prophecy. For now his Parliament had a hole in it indeed, by reason of the bullet which had let out the life of his grandfather, the weary, embittered old Regent Lennox.

The Earl of Mar came that evening to the gaunt chamber in the tower where James was sitting before the fire, waiting for his supper, clumsily whittling at a piece of wood with his knife, and whistling a dreary little tune of boredom through his teeth. The Earl of Mar took a stool on the far side of the hearth, and watched his ward in silence. The child looked tired; he was not thinking of what he was doing, and the knife with which he was gashing the hard wood was too sharp for his guardian's comfort. Like many clever children, James was as awkward with his hands as he was nimble with his mind. The knife, slithering and skidding on the scarred surface, threatened every second to chop at one of the carelessly adjacent fingers. The Earl chewed at his white moustache, frowning as he wondered how to gain possession of the weapon without offending the dignity of the serious child now wielding it.

"How does the work go?" he asked at last.

James shook his head with an exasperated sigh. "I cannot do it," he said. "I *see* it well enough, yet I cannot

make what I see. Sir, why can I not make with my hands what I see so clearly in my mind?"

"It is the same with all of us who would make things," said the Earl.

"Is it?" James held up the tormented block of wood, slashed and hacked into something which seemed ultimately likely to have four legs, a head, and a tail. "You cannot even tell what it is, now, can you?" gloomed James, as the Earl hesitated and turned the creature over in his hands, his face carefully grave.

"Why yes," said the Earl at a venture. "It is no doubt yon little pony of yours. It will be an excellent pony presently, by the looks of it, and with a little more work spent——"

"It is not a pony," said James. "It is Roderick, the old hound that is past the hunt and lies in front of the stables in the sun."

"A likely enough hound," said the Earl of Mar.

James looked up at him, laughing, and pointing an accusing finger. "A minute since you said it was entirely a pony."

"No, indeed," the Earl explained gravely. "I said it might become a pony, and so indeed it might. But still, it might as well become a hound, since all I can see at present is an animal with four stout legs and a head like a cannon-ball."

James giggled. "It is a *hound*," he said.

"Yet I could make a pony of it, given that knife of yours for five minutes," said the Earl. "I was once reckoned passably good with a knife and a bit of wood. when I was your height. Unless I have forgotten——"

"Let me see if you have forgotten," said James, impulsively thrusting knife and wood into his guardian's hands. The Earl took them with relief, and stuck the knife into a faggot by the hearth while he leaned forward

to inspect James's work. James crouched on his heels beside him, breathing heavily as he watched. The fire-light threw their faces into strong relief, emphasising the lines of the Earl's fine bones, and the artistry of the sure hands which turned the misshapen block of wood to and fro, by contrast with the childish awkwardness and uncertainty of the boy at his feet. James hugged his knees and smiled as the Earl took up the knife again and set to work, with shrewd, strong cuts that were less drastic and more effective than James's violent onslaught had been.

"See . . . here comes his muzzle, there his ears, with the poll between them . . . there his mane runs, back towards the saddle . . . the rump here, tapering to the flank . . . slowly does it: we gain nothing by slicing at his vitals like a scullion in a brawl."

James nodded, chin on knees. The Earl's slow, murmuring voice and patient fingers soothed him strangely, while on the flags between them a pile of flaky wood chips grew. James watched it dreamily. He hardly noticed that the Earl was no longer talking of the spirited little animal which was emerging from the wood. His voice was as quiet, as comforting, but he was telling the boy something about the raid of the night before.

"They wished, or so it seems, to take the greatest lords of the kingdom and hold them to ransom," said the Earl. "They did not succeed in that. But they shot your grandfather, the Regent."

James reluctantly brought his attention from his entrancing new toy to his remote grandfather. "Did they hurt him?" he asked, since the Earl seemed to be waiting for him to say something.

"They killed him," said the Earl, turning the little horse on its back on his palm in order to whittle out the curve of its stomach.

"Oh," said James.

"It was a senseless, desperate thing to do," said the Earl of Mar, his fingers busy. "What they thought to gain, by killing the poor old man——"

"Will they kill us?" asked James.

The Earl shook his head, his knife flickering in the firelight, sending the old sick, hot pang through James's stomach.

"Then what will happen?" he asked.

"Another man will take up the burden of ruling the country as Regent till you, as its King, are old enough to take these burdens on your own shoulders."

"Shall I have to do that soon?" James's face was puckered with alarm. "It does not seem to be a safe task, this governing. Will you not do it instead of me?"

"I will do it *for* you meanwhile," said the Earl, "if the Council chooses me, as I hear they will. But finally it is your task, from which you may not withdraw. You are the King."

James stared at him. "What is this kingship that they all talk of?" he demanded. "Master Buchanan is never tired of telling me that I am to be the servant of my people. But the women who used to bring my food before I came to eat in the Great Hall used to say that the kingdom of Scotland and all within it were mine by the will of God. They begged me to give them parts of it, too. What is the truth, sir?"

The Earl checked the chafing movements of his knife up the little horse's forelegs as he looked past the boy out of the narrow window beyond which the fine rain seeped along in sheets, hiding the darkening country from them as the west wind drove it. "The truth," he repeated. "Somewhere between these extremes, maybe, and the greatest rulers alone know how to find it."



"How shall I learn?" asked James. "If I must rule, I want to rule indeed, and not by name alone."

The Earl nodded approvingly. "You shall so, you shall so. It is for you to learn, first, what is best for the country you rule, and then to secure it, by what means you may."

"What is best, then?" James asked.

The Earl worked diligently at the prancing hooves of his toy. "Peace, as I see it," he said at last. "The length and breadth of Scotland have been torn by these wars which set men all born within the same circle of Scottish hills stabbing and slashing at each other in the causeway for they know not what."

"Why should they do that?" said James, surprised. "I have seen them and wondered."

The Earl did not look up from his wood-carving, but James knew that the question had embarrassed him.

"You mean—because of my mother?" said James, who had already found that questions about the Queen embarrassed the people round him. All except Master Buchanan, who mysteriously and uncompromisingly called her "that whore of Babylon," and afterwards spat.

The Earl nodded, though to the best of his knowledge, and according to his instructions, the name of Mary Stuart was never mentioned in the presence of her son.

"Does she rule Scotland or do I?" said James presently.

"She does not rule, because she has laid her authority down," said the Earl after some hesitation. "Nor do you rule, since you are not yet of age. But your ministers rule for you, and I, if I am chosen as your Regent, will do all I may to bring peace to the kingdom so that quiet men may live without danger from the ambitious. Well, lad, here is the horse I have made for you. Like it?"

He balanced the little creature on his palm, where it pranced, forelegs in the air, mane and tail displayed. He

held it towards James, who took it, his mind on other things, his face troubled by his thoughts.

"Thank you. But do some people still say that my mother rules Scotland?"

"Some, yes. But when I am made Regent I will reason with them."

"Will you have them hanged? Johnny Mar says that is the way to deal with all enemies and traitors. Then no one will say I am not King."

The Earl of Mar shook his head. "My son speaks like a child because he is a child still," he said. "These men who hold the Castle of Edinburgh for the Queen are brave, and I would not rob Scotland of them because they and I think differently. I hope to bring about peace."

"Oh," said James. And then, "Is it more difficult to bring about peace than war, since so many make war and so few peace?"

"It is the work of a lifetime," said the Earl of Mar, rising rather wearily out of his chair by the hearth and spurning the pile of wood chips aside. "Yet if I'm spared, we might contrive it between us."

"I hope we may," said James. He did not really understand what the Earl meant, but his guardian had been friendly over the making of the horse and James felt that he should agree with him in return. So he patted the toy as it stood on the hearthstone, its shadow flung across the floor by the flames behind it almost to the farther wall. "Make peace for Scotland and some more horses for me."

"I will, boy, I will," said the Earl.

"And some hounds to run with them," shouted James, as the Earl opened the door and stepped into the draughty corridor outside.

But the kindly Earl made no more wooden toys for James, for after he had been chosen Regent he was kept

too busy with the innumerable affairs of state, which took him up and down the kingdom at all times, to confer with the other members of the Council, to check a rising in the Queen's name in the Highlands; to Leith, to Perth, to Edinburgh, working himself into a gaunt, exhausted shadow. He did all one man might and tried to do more to bring the confusion in the affairs of Scotland into some sort of order. Above all he wished to restore the confidence of the merchants and set trade on the move, to relieve the desolation of the inhabitants of the devastated areas, and to bring some hope of peace out of the stubborn antagonism of men who should have been friends.

But Kirkcaldy of Grange, holding out doggedly in the Castle of Edinburgh, ripped the very roofs off the houses in the High Street and sold them in the market instead of the coal and peat which was not to be had. The Earl of Mar shook his head at the news of this extremity. It disturbed him more than the cannon-ball which had passed through the canvas of his own tent, rigged outside the city wall, for he knew that the people would more easily forgive the loss of life than the loss of their property, and he had set his heart on saving the Laird of Grange for service against crueller enemies than his own countrymen.

As a last hope the Earl sent for Sir James Melville, who had been prudently observing the dangerous doings in Edinburgh from his country house in Fife. Sir James came, and agreed to do what he could for the sake of his brother, Sir Robert, shut up with his nephew, the Laird of Grange, and Maitland of Lethington in the Castle.

He went secretly to the defenders as unofficial peace-maker, and returned in due course with great hopes. They had some questions to ask, but in the main they

agreed to the Earl's terms, which were honourable. When the Council had given its sanction, they might even form the basis of a lasting peace.

The Earl of Mar was delighted. The Council should meet, everything would go well, and the futile wars be at an end. He went about the routine business of the leader of an army in the field with something like gaiety. His life work was almost accomplished. Once peace was made he might go home to Stirling and whittle the boy King a whole pack of hounds in the intervals of teaching him statesmanship.

But he had counted without the Earl of Morton and the hostility of the preachers. Nothing but the capture of the Castle and the execution of its defenders would satisfy the ministers who demanded justice in the name of the Lord, and Morton, who wished Kirkcaldy out of the way for reasons of his own. The truce, declared in August, 1572, a year after the Earl of Mar had undertaken the Regency, was bitterly opposed. The citizens of Edinburgh had not forgotten the matter of the rafters sold as firewood, and the English Ambassador, sent north with secret instructions to trouble the troubled waters further, cursed all peacemakers and did his best to carry out his instructions.

But the Earl of Mar was happy. "Though mind, the truce is but the first step," he declared to Sir James Melville. "We have yet to convince the Council that the whole conflict is bloody folly."

Sir James had just arrived at the house outside Edinburgh which served as the Earl's more substantial headquarters since the disastrous episode of the cannon-ball which had whipped away his tent. "There is no hope for the country while we tear at each other's throats and save our enemies the trouble. Is that not just what England wants? This blood-letting will keep us out of

mischief, and too weak to disturb her rulers' sleep at night."

"Likely enough," said Sir James Melville. He had papers in his hand, and his face was grave.

The Earl of Mar noticed it. "What ails you, man? You had such high hopes when last I saw you."

"As well I might," said Sir James Melville. "But now I fear our plans are riddled, Mar, and sunk. The post's come in from Leith."

"With news? What news? Out with it, man! I'd rather hear it now than have you stand there glum as a horror's head. What is it?"

"The packet out of France brought papers from my agents. I had them an hour ago, and came here straight away. The Catholics of Paris rose up a few days since—on the Eve of St. Bartholomew, they say—and massacred every Huguenot who lay in the city that night for the Royal wedding. The streets were aslop with blood."

The Earl stared at him, white. "This is not, *cannot* be true. It is a crime to shake the world——"

"I wish it were false. But there—read those." Sir James threw down his documents.

The Earl snatched at them, read, and groaned.

"It could not have been more cursedly inopportune," said Sir James. "It will be the death warrant of every man in the Castle. The Protestant ministers will let the citizens have no mercy now on those who support a Catholic Queen. Why, she herself came out of France, which now stinks with Protestant blood."

"That this should happen . . ." murmured the Earl distractedly as he read. "That this should happen now. What is to be done, Melville? What is to be done?"

Sir James shook his head. "It seems to me——" he had begun, when a servant entered, bowed and stood silent. He wore the livery of the Earl of Morton.

"Well?" said the Earl.

"My master is at Dalkeith, your Grace, and prays that you will do him the honour of accepting his hospitality. He knows that you intend to call the Council together, and suggests that a banquet at his house first might relieve the tedium of state affairs. As time is short he asks you to forgive the lack of ceremony and answer his invitation by word of mouth."

"That is a kindly thought," said the Earl of Mar. "I have a great deal to discuss with my lord of Morton. Tell him that I am honoured, and will come. To-morrow, is it?"

"To-morrow, if you please, your Grace," the servant said. "I am to take your answer back at once."

The door clapped shut behind him, and the Earl of Mar turned in surprise to question Sir James, who had been gesticulating anxiously in a corner.

"Why are you glowering there?" he asked. "Shaking your head at me behind the fellow's back. What ails you, man?"

Sir James answered this question with another. "Does my lord of Morton give many such banquets? I had heard he was something near."

"Maybe," laughed the Earl of Mar, "and all the more cause to accept his invitations, Melville, for fear another should not come my way."

"I would not dine with Morton, now, above all times," said Sir James, shuffling papers.

"You need not: you have not been asked, my friend," said the Earl, pleased by this chance of an informal and friendly discussion of matters of State, so often mellowed, in his experience, by good food and wine.

"I know it," said Sir James unperturbed. "Yet if I walked on your shoe-leather, John, I would not go to that

banquet, no, not for all the peacocks at the Queen of England's board."

"Would you not? It will interest me to find whether there are peacocks at the Earl of Morton's," said the Regent, taking up his quill.

"I spoke in earnest," said Sir James. "I beg you not to go."

"Why not?"

"To be blunt, John," said Sir James, fiercely rubbing his chin, "I think that Morton has no liking either for you or for your truce. He would have both ended."

The Earl chuckled. "Nonsense, man. You are seeing bogles. The business on St. Bartholomew has made you fanciful. This is not France, and, frankly, I would not offend the Earl of Morton, at this moment above all. He can be useful, if he will."

"Aye, but will he?" said Melville, with a worried air. "You'll go then, John?"

"I will."

Sir James, looking at him dourly, shrugged.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

SO THE REGENT WENT to the Earl of Morton's banquet, and was pressed to speak of his plans, his hopes of peace, not only in Scotland but throughout the world. His speech caused consternation among his audience, most of whom considered that better pickings were to be had from nicely fermented unrest. The Earl of Morton, on the other hand, seemed greatly interested. He listened with approval, asked a number of pertinent questions, and allowed himself to seem to be convinced.

But half an hour later the Earl of Mar rose from the table ghastly-faced, called for his horse and rode off, with hardly a backward glance, towards Stirling and his home like a man who knows his death upon him. The following day he died, racked with strange pains, over which the physicians made their usual mysteries. He had, they said, overtaxed a delicate constitution out of all reason. For years he had worked himself beyond the limits of his strength. The final collapse, in their opinion, was due to a fever which proved too much for an already exhausted heart. Many people advanced other theories, but privately, for the Earl of Morton was Regent now, and his displeasure to be avoided. He soon made it clear that he knew what he wanted and meant to obtain it.

With the help of an English subsidy, English reinforcements, and poisoned wells he soon starved the Castle into surrender, made an example of the leaders of the Queen's party and produced a peace to his liking. Whether it would prove to be also to the liking of the people remained to be seen. But at first the citizens of Edinburgh were



happy enough to find their streets no longer required as a battlefield, and encumbered, not with warlike barricades, but with piles of timber, trusses of thatch and loads of tiles for the re-building of their shattered homes. Workmen were climbing, whistling and hammering: masons were busy with walls that had been blasted with cannonballs, thatchers and joiners had set about the roofs that had been stripped off to provide fuel for the Queen's men defending the Castle. It was spring again, the spring of 1574. The shamefully gibbeted bodies of Kirkcaldy of Grange and his lieutenants had been cut down, and Sir James Melville, thankful only for having been able to save the life of his brother, Sir Robert, with the help of Mr. Killigrew, the English Ambassador, had retired again to his home in Fife to shake his head over the death of the Earl of Mar and wait for better times.

Andrew Haliburton had conveyed his household thankfully back from Leith, and was busy superintending the return of all his stock-in-trade in heavy chests, barred and padlocked with iron. From time to time he consulted a list and shouted instructions to the men who grumbled as they heaved the heavy loads into the newly set up booth, with a stout door and walls and a good wide window for display, which now replaced the flimsier one torn down by the Queen's men the year before.

"The silks are in the chests with the red cross. Set them over by the far wall. Put down the serges and woollens in those marked with blue, close to hand here," said Master Haliburton. "See to it, Rob. There is likely to be more call for the woollens than the fine silks for some time to come, more's the pity. Well, James, and what brings you here, eh?"

James Mossman, onetime Queen's jeweller, seemed somehow to have shrunk. The cheerful creases had sagged about his face, and his little dark eyes were scared.

"Oh, just to see how the changed times were suiting you, Andrew," he said. "Well enough, I see, from your fine new house front. Bigger windows, too. Aye, aye, it's fine to be on the winning side." His voice was bitter.

"But your own new house in the Canongate, is it not still standing?" said the merchant in surprise.

"Standing, yes, but empty," mourned Mossman.

"Empty, how's that?"

"I have hardly a stick of furniture left," said the Queen's jeweller. "All has been taken. And I was lately sent for by the Regent Morton to give an account of every earring and clasp, every seed pearl and diamond chip which had been in my keeping on the Queen's account during the last five years or more. Not so much as a bit of gilded lead escaped him. Eh, he is a hard man, that."

"Hard men are needed, these days," said Master Haliburton, shading his eyes from the spring sunshine to watch the workmen as they crawled about his roof, hammering new tiles into place. "We must have peace if trade is to go on."

"Yes, yes," agreed the jeweller. "Peace, certainly. But I was sorry that they hanged Sir William. He was a fine soldier, and good to the Queen."

"Kirkcaldy of Grange," said the merchant obstinately, "fired my roof as good as over my head. He was well served."

The heavy face of the jeweller was puckered with consternation. "Tuts, Andrew, to hang the bonniest fighter in Scotland or France? Think shame of yourself."

But Andrew Haliburton checked his neighbour's eloquence with an impatient gesture. "Man, we've heard more than enough of bonnyfighters these many years. I'd not turn my head in the street to see the finest soldier that ever was heard tell on go by in his armour. I like the looks of the Regent Morton no more than you——"

"They say," said the jeweller, leaning forward to whisper behind his hand, "that he was the death of my lord of Mar."

"Oh, aye, they say this and they say that. Because my lord of Mar was at a banquet at Dalkeith and took to his bed afterwards he must needs have poison in him. He died of a fever, man, at home in Stirling."

"He rode there straight from the banquet to die," said the jeweller.

"He died, and there's an end," said Andrew Haliburton.

The Queen's party was indeed finally broken: the English from Berwick, who had helped the Earl of Morton to batter down the defences of the Castle, had gone home, leaving Morton in charge of the country's affairs. The new Regent was not popular. His meanness was a byword: had he not outraged the ministers by annexing the stipends of many weaker brethren on the score that there were more ministers to preach than congregations to listen to them?

But his authority was at first undisputed, because the grumbling lords who opposed him were poor, indolent and leaderless, and though the merchants and common people liked him no more than their betters did, they would, at that time, have accepted the authority of the very Devil himself had he offered them peace.

So the new Regent was free to occupy himself in setting the country to rights, which he did after his own fashion and greatly to his personal advantage. He cut down expenses on all sides, and bestowed gifts only where he knew them to be necessary, to the spies about his person, and those who might ingratiate him into the favour of the most influential men in the kingdom. At first he overlooked the Court which surrounded James, now rising nine, at Stirling, and it was not for some time that he

was warned that the gentlemen in attendance spoke openly against him to the young King.

The Earl of Morton had no opinion of children's intelligence, and he still thought of James as the brat who had snubbed him in front of all the Parliament at Stirling. But he grudgingly recognised this as an occasion for action. Presently most of James's gentlemen received gifts with a hint that more might follow if it were adequately earned.

The gentlemen in attendance were not slow to appreciate the offer, nor were they too proud to take advantage of it. They were extravagant and penniless: their estates were suffering from the rise of the merchant middle-classes, who drove a hard bargain, and insisted on cash down for every trifling purchase. The very world was changing round them; even the scallywag retainers who had been housed and fed by their forefathers in return for service had begun to demand wages instead. Ready money was heaven-sent indeed, and if it meant revising one's outlook, well, it was cheap at the price. The Earl of Morton was an excellent fellow as long as his money lasted.

So James, sitting at dinner on several cushions in the great chair at the head of the board in the Hall, heard with some surprise that the gentleman on his right had the highest opinion of the wisdom and zeal of the Earl of Morton.

"Do you not think so, my lord?" one recipient asked another.

"Yes, indeed. The Earl of Morton is the country's ablest governor. He—er—sets the welfare of the people far before his own."

James, who was cutting up his meat with a thoughtful frown, turned his candid young gaze on the speaker, now complacently smirking at his plate. "Why, my

lord," he said in his clear voice, "it would seem that you change your coat?"

Round the long table conversation died. The whole company listened, as they had listened to him in the Parliament Hall, years ago, when he had also spoken more truly than he knew. The young courtier flushed.

"How so, your Highness? I have the highest opinion of the Regent, as all here know."

A slight snigger rose round the board. James did not seem to notice. He wiped his gravy-stained fingers on his napkin and began to break up a round of bread. "And yet," he observed, with grave interest, "last Sabbath you spoke of him as a miserly old hypocrite who would let his sheep perish from the cold rather than leave them with half an inch of wool after shearing-time."

"Indeed—I—I——" protested the young lord, unheard in the general laughter. "I cannot have made myself clear."

"Oh yes, you did," said James cheerfully. "Very clear indeed. Bring me more venison; there is nothing but gristle here."

Hastily they carried away his plate, and even more hastily changed the conversation to the hunt in which James was to take part for the first time next day, under the special care of the Master of the Stables. James allowed himself to be distracted; he was unaware of the importance of his comment and extremely excited at the prospect of the hunt.

So he did not notice the sidelong glances which passed to and fro among his attendants. Nor did he notice any more changes of coat, for Morton's pensioners went more warily about their business and some members of the Household remained uninfluenced by the Regent's jingling arguments. James's new guardian, the Master of Mar, for instance, was well aware that possession of

the person of the boy was of the utmost importance to the current government, and he disliked both the Earl of Morton and his methods. While the King was a child he and his sister-in-law, the Countess, were not to be persuaded to let their charge out of their hands, no, not at the command of the Regent himself.

Morton bided his time, accumulating wealth and spending it grudgingly, estranging the ministers of the Kirk with his persistent attempts to change its jealously cherished constitution in order to annex its property. The outcry which greeted his machinations reached even the schoolroom at Stirling, where George Buchanan (one of James's attendants whom the Regent had most conspicuously failed to bribe) still reigned. Johnny Mar, now the Earl in succession to his father, was impatient of further schooling, and in the habit of whispering instructions to James to cause some sort of a diversion before his complete ignorance of the lesson was revealed.

"Ask him something," mouthed Johnny, one morning, as Master Buchanan rose to take a book from the window-sill. "It will be my turn to read next, and I know nothing of all this sad stuff."

James grinned good-naturedly. He himself could have read the page of Latin at a glance, but he had a great admiration for Johnny Mar, with his gruff, man's voice, his startling oaths, and continual grievance that his father's death should leave his uncle, who was after all merely the Master and not the Earl, in command of Edinburgh Castle. So he turned to his tutor with the first question which came into his head from some of the talk overheard among the gentlemen in waiting.

"Master Buchanan, what is a tulchan bishop?"

George Buchanan brought his thoughts back from the time of Plutarch to the reign of the small boy at his

elbow, who was bending forward to look up into his face with that wide-eyed earnestness and puckering brow typical of all pupils who have drawn red herrings across the path of learning since time began.

"A tulchan bishop?" said George Buchanan. "That is a good enough question, boy, though I wonder what put it into your head, which would be better occupied with more classical matters."

"I heard them talking in the Hall before meat," said James. "And they seemed to think it an evil title, unfit for the Kirk."

"That is true enough," said George Buchanan, stormily. "Since a tulchan is a calf-skin stuffed with straw and set beside a cow to make it give its milk, and a tulchan bishop is one created by the Regent Morton to take the place of the bishops of the bad old days of popery as they die out. These bishops are to have the name of authority, and little more, for the money is to go into the hands of the Regent, and such lords as he pleases to share it with besides."

"Oh," said James. "He is anxious for money, then, the Regent Morton?"

"Money? Not only money," grumbled George Buchanan, fairly launched into eloquence. A beatific expression spread slowly over the broad, blunt face of the young Earl of Mar, and the silent boys on the far side of the heavy table. "I can tell you a tale about that. There was a time when I had a pretty hackney. It carried me better than any horse I ever owned before. One day by chance I had to ride out from St. Andrews into the country of Fife, to enter into consultation with a scholar, who lived some miles away, so that while I talked I left the hackney tethered to his gate . . ."

Peace settled down on the schoolroom. The story was a familiar one, and had tided them over many a crisis.

The horse had been stolen by a servant and sold to the Earl of Morton, who had paid for it in all good faith and afterwards refused, not unnaturally, to give it back, for which Master Buchanan had never forgiven him. The last half-hour of the morning slid easily past, and the announcement of dinner on the table surprised Master Buchanan more than his pupils. They fled cheerfully, on his dismissal; all except James, who had stretched out his hand for a small, brown-covered book, printed some years before, in the slightly uneven characters which were apt to be produced by the early Scottish printing-houses, and had inquisitively begun to read the title-page.

It was a version of the Psalms, paraphrased into Latin, so the inscription told him, by his tutor himself. This was not surprising: Master Buchanan had written a history book and contributed to a Latin grammar; there might well be no end to his writings. But what had caught his attention was the dedication itself. Here was his mother's name, so seldom and so warily used in his hearing, once again, followed by English verses of Master Buchanan's composition. But their substance was strange. Here was none of the usual virulence of hatred which frightened him: here instead was affection, reverence, set out in courtly phrases which seemed to conjure up a sunnier picture than that of the solemn Scottish Court. Master Buchanan was now storing the other text-books in his shelf, and James began to read the dedication, half aloud:

“Oh daughter of a hundred kings  
That holdest 'neath thy happy sway  
This ancient realm of Caledon;  
Whose worth outstrips thy destiny,  
Whose mind thy sex; whose grace thy peers;  
Whose virtues leave behind thy years——”



But at this point George Buchanan came back to the table and looked over his pupil's shoulder. With a sudden, violent movement he swept the little book out of James's hands, and into the secret pocket of his deep sleeve. "What call have you to finger my private things?" snarled Master Buchanan.

James was surprised. "It did not seem private," he said mildly. "The paraphrase of the Psalms was surely intended for others to see besides——" he hesitated, then ventured, "besides my mother."

Buchanan stared at him, silent. There was more colour than usual on the thin cheek-bones, and the close-folded mouth was working strangely, as he looked at the thin boy whose angular gawkinsness was so unlike his mother's grace, whose only likeness to her was in the quick and restless mind which snatched at all the teaching he gave it as the flames snatched at the dried grass when men burned the hill pastures in spring. Then the boy seemed her son indeed, so that he, who had been *her* tutor, too, almost lost count of the years and the calamities which lay between him and those visits to Holyrood. He could still hear her voice, petulant, like a child's, *'Marie, Marie, make them send up more wood. I am chilled to the bones in this palace which might be a grave. Ah, Master Buchanan, draw up your stool and tell me how the gardens looked by the Seine. Is it only six months since you left Paris? Dear Lord, and I have not seen it for nearly as many years . . .'*

"What makes you look so queer?" Mary's son was asking him.

"What is it to you how I look?" said George Buchanan. "I will not have you pry into my affairs."

"But they are my affairs, too," said James, with a odd air of young dignity. "They concern my mother."

You must have known—and liked her, Master Buchanan, to write as you did.”

George Buchanan twitched the shoulder of his gown into place.

“Whatever I thought once, that is done with,” he said.

“Then,” James asked with innocent penetration, “was there something like the matter of the hackney which turned you against the Queen as that theft turned you against the Regent?”

Master Buchanan paused half-way to the door and flung his answer viciously at his pupil. “Yes. Murder. Was that not enough?”

James stared at him, horror struck. His tutor did not spare him. “Yes, fine and grand you may be, James Stuart, King of Scotland, but your mother was a murderess. That shakes you, does it? Yes, I thought it would. The truth is seldom as agreeable as comfits, even to kings.”

He folded his thin lips together with satisfaction and went off in search of his midday meal, which would have been brought, as usual, to his own chamber, while James, white and shaken, sat clutching the edge of the table in front of him till the quills rattled in their tray.

When they came to fetch him down to dinner he would neither eat nor speak, and it was not till he had jogged spiritlessly round the tilting ground on the gay little horse which had taken the place of the first fat pony that he recovered sufficiently from the shock of Master Buchanan’s accusations to mention the matter to Johnny Mar as they both stood in the courtyard watching their beasts put away. Johnny Mar, nearing his fourteenth birthday, and exuberant in the knowledge that he had his mother’s promise to set him free from lessons after it, was kind to James, who had so much longer to wait.

Indeed, being a King, he would never be free of lessons and guardians and such like to the end of his days, while he, Johnny, could order his life as he pleased.

So when James pulled at his sleeve he shifted the straw he was chewing after the manner of the Master of the Stables, and looked down at the thin child at his elbow with an inquiring grunt.

James did not ask the question which was in his mind. Because it concerned his mother, instinct urged him to disguise it. He asked instead: "When did my father die?"

Johnny Mar looked at the smaller boy with some astonishment. "What in the world's set you on knowing that?"

James shook his head at him, but repeated the question.

"Well," said the young Earl of Mar, "how old are you?"

"Nine."

"Then it must be over eight years since. I've heard them say it was not a year since your birth in Edinburgh Castle."

"How did he die?"

Johnny Mar threw away his straw. The wind caught it and flicked it over the roof of the stable in a sudden draught of air. Both boys watched it go, but James soon brought his eyes back to young Mar's face. "He was murdered," the older boy said at last.

"Murdered? Who murdered him?"

Johnny Mar was becoming restless under these difficult questions, and the queer, nervous light in James's wide blue eyes. He began to stroll away, but James kept in step beside him. "Oh, well—my lord of Bothwell—so they said——"

"Did any one say that—the Queen, my mother, had a hand in it?" asked James at last.

Johnny Mar screwed up his face and shaded his eyes

with his hand as if he were watching a kestrel hovering for a stoop in the distant sky, while he tried to think of some way to avoid answering the question. What could he say, knowing that nearly everybody in Scotland held the Queen as guilty as Bothwell himself?

"Did they, Jock?" persisted James.

"You must ask my uncle, the Master," mumbled Johnny Mar. "How should I know?"

"But you have heard men say so?"

"Aye," admitted young Mar, adding, vainly enough, "but no one believes all they hear."

"No," said James. "Oh, no." But his face was pinched as he turned away, to walk, followed by the men-at-arms who were detailed to guard his every movement, up the stairs which led to his apartments in the tower. The accusation which had not been more than a nightmare when made by any one so remote and old as Master Buchanan, seemed to become real and malevolent when grudgingly admitted by a contemporary like Johnny Mar.

He had no memory of his mother. His image of her had been built up from the giggling hints of his nurses, who used to tell him that he was too ugly a little frog to be really the son of such a fine lady. But when he could not sleep and shouted imperiously for some one to come and talk to him, they would interrupt their whispered conversations in the room beyond only to advise him to go to sleep or his mother would come and take him away to prison with her. He began to picture her like some of the fearful creatures he encountered in his classical reading with Master Buchanan, half woman and half devil, with claws of brass and clashing wings. That was how his mother would come, swooping out of an empty night sky, to take him away in her claws.

Later, he knew this for nonsense. But the new picture

of his mother as a murderess fretted and seethed about in the darker places of his mind during the next few years. At twelve, he was intelligent and eager, but indolent and without much staying power. His imagination, too, was less of a blessing than a curse. It kept getting in the way of achievements which were well within his strength because of its uncomfortable habit of presenting him with pictures of the consequences.

Sometimes the children of the royal schoolroom escaped from Master Buchanan for long enough to climb the twisted, treacherous old mulberry trees in the Nether Garden. Johnny Mar would make nothing of the climb and stand swaying on the crackling topmost fork to shout that he could see away over the battlements to the silver loops of the Forth far below. But James, struggling obstinately up towards him, would suddenly see, instead, beyond the branch he reached for, the white rent from which it would break, hear the crash of his own fall to lie at the tree's foot, his neck snapped and his limbs twisted. Afterwards he could climb no more, in spite of young Mar's shouts and hand at his collar, but must cling, trembling, to the safe, rough trunk.

One day the Regent came to see him. The Earl of Morton had unwillingly realised that James was no longer a child and that he would do well to make friends with the boy for whom he governed the kingdom. Reports from James's attendants seemed to show that he was developing both wit and independence. So he paid a visit to Stirling.

It was not, from his point of view, a success. The Regent Morton did not understand boys, and though he did his best to make friends, he did not seem to have the knack of it. He protested his loyalty, made laborious inquiries about James's health and progress, and a few still more laborious jokes, but James, fidgiting in Master Buchanan's high chair, disconcerted him with a direct

stare which gave no clue to his thoughts. The Earl smiled ingratiatingly and talked of Edinburgh. He wished, it seemed, to show James the Castle, and he invited him to leave Stirling to visit it with something of the eagerness of a spider in his web. It was shameful, he declared, that the King of Scotland should be as good as a prisoner in Stirling when Edinburgh impatiently awaited a sight of him. After all, he had only to use his authority, to order the Master to make the arrangements. Why not? He was the King.

James showed interest for the first time. "I may be the King, but the power is with you, as Regent." It was a newly discovered grievance.

"I only hold it to your order." Again the Earl of Morton made the mistake of underestimating James's intelligence. He was so anxious to get him out of the hands of the Erskines of Mar that he grew careless. Let him once gain possession of the King and he would manage the rest. Besides, anything served as a bait. It might bring the boy to Edinburgh, and children's memories were short.

"You mean——" said James slowly.

"I mean that I am always ready to lay the office down at your Highness's command. It is time that you took the government of the country into your own hands. Is it not?"

"Perhaps," said James.

"And now about this visit to Edinburgh——" said the Regent. "Will you not give me the pleasure of entertaining you there? I promise you the occasion shall not lack splendour. There will be feasting and dancing——"

"I will think about it," said James warily.

The Earl frowned. "Let us make plans, your Highness," he urged.

But James was busy with plans of his own and would

not be drawn further. The Earl of Morton was forced to take his leave without getting more out of him than a non-committal murmur and a shake of the head.

He left Stirling uneasily, fearing that he had hardly bettered his cause. But even so, the damage he had done astounded him. James had not swallowed the bait of the Edinburgh visit which was to bring him into Morton's spider web. No, but it seemed that Morton's promise to resign the Regency at his King's command had greatly taken the boy's fancy. For at the next Council meeting James announced to his startled statesmen that he intended to accept the Regent's offer and assume the government himself.

The news caused a first-class sensation, and the Regent, almost apoplectic with bottled fury, guessed that he had the Master of Mar to thank for the recoil of his careful plans upon himself. Officially, however, he could do nothing but express obedience, and even a wry-faced pleasure at the sight of James, three months short of his twelfth birthday, taking his new position at the Council board with all the airs of an inexperienced young peacock, and setting his fist to scrawl an unsteady "James R." at the foot of documents of state.

James liked power: it had a sweet new taste in his mouth. But it also mounted to his head. He knew everything. He could do everything. No one could teach him anything new. He strutted. He was King of Scotland, and quite unbearable in the royal schoolroom. Master Buchanan shook his head at him and grumbled that James signed documents without reading them, for sheer pleasure in the importance of his own name. There was a day when Master Buchanan himself laid a document before James and smiled as the boy reached happily for a quill without a question. And afterwards the tutor made them all listen while he

read aloud what James had signed. It was somewhat unexpected.

"We, James, King of Scotland, from our Castle at Stirling, this first day of April, 1578, do give and allocate unto Master Buchanan, for the term of two weeks, all the state, dignities and privileges of kingship in our stead. Let all our Household observe this solemn command, whereof they fail in the least particular at their peril."

Round the long table James's companions nudged each other and grinned. James himself gaped, speechless.

"But—but I do not want you to be King instead of me," he stammered at last.

"Indeed? Is this your signature?"

"Yes," James admitted. "But I did not know—I will blot it out." He held out his hand for the paper, but Master Buchanan held it out of his reach.

"You should have known. Your signature is not to be scrawled so lightly. What kings write cannot be blotted out like the writings of lesser folk."

"Then—then—what will you do?" faltered James. The lovely business of being king had suddenly gone wrong. What had he done? Had he destroyed his kingship? But they had called him the Lord's anointed. That meant that God had chosen him: it could not be changed. His kingship was a precious thing. It was a weapon against the slow-speaking, ominous territorial lords. They might browbeat him in conference, but they could not write the miraculous word which created law. He sweated in distress.

"What will you do now?" he repeated unsteadily.

George Buchanan looked down at his anxious face and forbore to drive his point further. The lesson had been learnt.

"Do?" he said. "Why, this." He tore the tough docu-



ment across and across again, then tossed the fragments on the pine logs that blazed and snapped on the hearth.

"But another time, your Highness," the pedagogue in him prompted him to add, "the damage may not be so easily undone."

James let out his breath on a long, luxurious sigh of relief. Next time—what did next time matter? He would see it did not come.

But the Earl of Morton also loved power, and the loss of the Regency rankled. The young King must rule now; that could not be undone. But he debated long and earnestly, as he occupied himself with the cultivation of the gardens on his Loch Leven estate, by what means he might outwit the Erskines of Mar and regain the power if not the title he had lost.

At Stirling Johnny Mar had not come to lessons with Master Buchanan since his fourteenth birthday, now three years past, which had been an emancipation indeed. He had pitched his Latin grammar over the rock from the highest point of the battlements and triumphantly watched it bounce from one jagged pinnacle to another, shedding a flight of pages as it went. He had his hawks, his hounds, his horses and his servants, these days: he rode gloriously about in high boots with long spurs.

For a year or two these things had been enough. But about the time that James dismissed the Regent he took a fancy to see the world. He pestered his mother hourly till she gave permission, he persuaded his uncle, the Master, to ride with him to Edinburgh, and was exceedingly unwilling to come home at the end of a fortnight's visit.

The Countess scolded and fretted when her brother-in-law came back alone. Who were those kinsmen Johnny had discovered? Would he be safe with them?

Where was he lodged? Were the beds clean? Whom had he visited? Where was he going with his friends?

The Master answered as well as he could, and went out to sit in the stables till his sister-in-law should have calmed down. Even if he had known that the young Earl of Mar had been sought out by the Earl of Morton and entertained by him with surprising magnificence, even flattered by invitations to give his advice on this and that, he might not have attached much importance to the matter. For Johnny Mar came back, as his uncle had prophesied, when his money was exhausted, babbling of the marvels of Edinburgh, and imploring his mother to open a town house in the Canongate and keep proper state there, instead of mewing herself up in a great tomb of a place like the Castle in Stirling.

The Countess smiled at him, and admired the cut of his clothes. Did they really wear as enormously stuffed trunks as these in the capital? And what had he done with himself there all the time?

Johnny Mar shrugged and shook his head, lounging across his mother's boudoir, kicking at the rushes as he grumbled that in Edinburgh people of their standing were putting carpets on their floors nowadays. The Queen had started the fashion years ago.

"You can have carpets, too, son, when you set up your fine town house," said his mother, bending over her embroidery.

"Yes, and when will that be? When the cows come home?"

The Countess threaded her needle in and out of the canvas. "As soon as you have money enough, and discretion in spending it," she said, "which you certainly have not at present. I sent you off with enough to keep your household for three months, and you come home telling me that you have spent it in a fortnight."

"Ah, but that was different," said young Mar eagerly. "I had never spent money before. I did not know how it melted. Now I know, and I will see to it that it does not melt again."

"So you have learned something from this jaunt of yours," said the Countess, gratified.

"Learned? I have learned in a fortnight more than I learned in the schoolroom yonder in ten years. Life, Mother, not books. That is the learning for me. Now Jamie, there——"

"His Highness, son. He has grown strangely noticing of late."

"Bah. *Him!* He is a poor thing that I could break over my knee."

"But whom you must defend with your life," said the Countess gravely. "His safety is in our charge."

"Of course I would do him no ill," said the young Earl lightly. "But about this house in Edinburgh, Mother. Tell me——"

"You must content yourself with biding in Stirling these few months at least," said the Countess, snipping off a crimson thread and searching in the bundle beside her for a green. "Then, when the summer is over and the harvest in, I will see what I can manage."

"But what shall I do meanwhile?" gloomed Johnny Mar. "Without my friends?"

"And you have no friends at home?"

"Old friends," said Johnny Mar. "They will keep."

"So it is the new ones that need tending, eh? I think the less of them. And there are many things for you to do here. You can help your uncle with affairs of the Castle. You can look to the ordering of the estate, see how dues are collected, listen to the Provost and the grumbles of the common people with roofs to be mended or a pigsty broken down. You can make one of the com-

pany about the King: he is in need of honest men. You can hunt——”

“Yes, I can hunt,” said young Mar.

“And at least you can leave my boudoir and occupy yourself elsewhere,” said his mother tartly. “You do nothing but kick up the rushes and drive me distracted. Go and talk to your uncle for a change.”

Young Mar grinned. “I had thought you would be pleased to see me, back at such long last.”

“Pleased to see you? I am pleased enough, but not to hear such a string of grumbles. And look at the pocket of your new velvet doublet, all torn as it is already.”

“I did it on the door-latch as I came in. These great old latches are such useless things. Now I would change them all and have——”

“Never mind what you would have, but strip off that coat and leave it with the sewing maids this minute. I will not see good stuff spoiled for want of a stitch. Take it off now. Let me see you take it off.”

Johnny Mar squirmed his way good-temperedly out of the slashed and padded doublet with its canvas lining, and handed it to his mother, who examined its workmanship jealously, with contemptuous little tweaks and turns.

“And is this all they could do for you in the city of Edinburgh? A canvas lining, indeed! If that is not like city tailors. All for show, with velvet and satin and dear knows what where the world sees it, and a harsh lining that will chafe a man’s skin. Tuts, I’ve no patience with their ways. And a pretty price you’d pay for it, too.”

“Fair to middling only. I will leave it with the sewing-lasses on my way down to the stables,” said Johnny Mar.

He pulled another doublet off its peg, tossed the coat with the torn pocket into the sewing-room, and sauntered down to the stables for a word with the grooms. He

arranged to ride early the next morning, starting before daylight, taking half a dozen attendants and the pick of the hounds. What else, shut up in Stirling, could a man do?

Next morning he was early awake and out of the Castle by the little postern in the ghostly light before dawn. The lane to the stables was usually quiet enough: to-day he was astounded to find it alive and stirring with strange men. A hand was laid on his arm, a slow voice greeted him.

"Why, here's the Earl of Mar. The very man I'd hoped for."

"Why, my lord of Morton——" Young Mar had been startled; his voice was uncertain.

"That's right. That's right. I have business with the King——"

"What? At this hour? The Castle is all asleep. Only the huntsmen are about. We are riding early to the hills."

"So I had heard. Nevertheless, I must see the King. I have papers of state which need his signature. I must set a man galloping towards London by daylight. Indeed, it is a thousand pities I had not met your uncle, the Master, instead."

"Why so?" Young Mar bristled with offended dignity. "What can my uncle do for you, my lord, that I cannot do?"

"Your uncle commands the Castle," said the Regent. "His keys could unlock the postern, so that I and a couple of my discreet gentlemen could visit the King in his chamber and trouble him but as long as it takes him to scrawl his name."

"And why should my keys not be as good as my uncle's? I am the Earl, and he is but the Master."

"I doubt if your authority——" suggested the Earl of

Morton. He took a step forward. There were certainly papers in his hands. Young Mar saw them. It would not take long to rouse James and get his signature. He would have this early visitor out of the Castle again inside five minutes, having done him a good turn in return for his kindness in Edinburgh. His uncle need know nothing—he would show the Earl of Morton that he had as much authority as his uncle.

“You need not be afraid to trust my authority,” said Johnny Mar. He pulled a bunch of keys from his pouch and jingled them. “Here is proof of it. If you will follow me, my lord——” He stooped over the lock of the postern door, which swung open on the quiet corridor. He turned to smile and nod at the Earl of Morton.

But he was pushed unceremoniously aside as the Earl hurried through the door, followed, not by the two discreet gentlemen he had mentioned, but by a steadily running company of men-at-arms with pikes at the trail. Young Mar flung himself at the door, only to be pushed roughly back against the wall.

Too late, he cupped his hands about his mouth and shouted the alarm. Morton’s men were inside the Castle; swarming through the Hall and up the great staircase. Servants, dazed with sleep, attempted to hold them off, shouted for lights and reinforcements. Steel grated and clashed against steel: in the Hall a couple of benches went over as men grappled in the dark.

James had been sound asleep, and the tumult in the Castle came to him only gradually, as a nightmare in which his mother was carrying him away to Hell. He woke, whimpering, and threw the covers aside. The clashing was real. His mother *had* come—no—those were the sounds of swords in combat. The Castle was being attacked again. How could he escape?

Hastily he groped for his clothes, buttoning his coat

on askew as he opened the door of his room. Below lay the stairs, and the dim Hall where creatures who might well be either men or devils were struggling and striking, swearing at the servants. They were trying to get up the staircase, to get at him. James, still half-awake, felt his legs sag under him. He clung to a stone pillar and shrieked:

"Help, murder, treason! Where is the Master? The Master of Mar!"

He blinked, shivering, at the confusion below. The defenders, taken by surprise, were getting very evidently the worst of it. They were breaking in all directions, scurrying for cover in the narrow passages, limping and bleeding. Some invaders were following them, others came leaping up the staircase, passing James without a glance, to keep the rest of the household in their rooms.

James, weeping with all the terror of a nightmare become reality, clutched at the cold, smooth surface of his pillar as if he expected to be haled off to some infernal destination, as indeed he did. His nurses' tales of witches and the fearful visitations of devils from Hell had not been wasted on his morbidly acute imagination, nourished on national and domestic unrest. In an extremity of terror he screwed his eyes shut in case of seeing the Devil in person, and broke his nails against the kind familiar stone of his everyday world for fear that they would pluck him from it and plunge him into the sulphur and brimstone of the pit.

"The Master of Mar! Where is the Master?" he screamed, beside himself at the clutch of Satanic claws on his shoulder.

"Your Highness: open your eyes," said a voice beside him.

"I will not. You are the Devil. I will *not* go with you."

"I am nothing of the sort," said a scandalised voice.  
"Open your eyes and see for yourself, boy."

James opened his eyes. He might detest the ex-Regent but he feared him less than the devils of the pit.

"Oh—it's you," he babbled. "I want the Master. Send him here to me."

The Regent smiled into his sandy whiskers. He could afford to be agreeable, in this moment of his success. But he wished things to be clear from the first. His little eyes were fierce as a weasel's as he twitched James's limp arm from the pillar.

"*I* am the master here now," he said.



## CHAPTER NINE

MASTER INDEED, though the next few months were lurid with quarrelling among the great lords, some opposing and some supporting his authority, with James bewildered in the midst of it all, miserably doing what he was told. But on the whole, Morton had reason to be pleased with himself. He might no longer be Regent, but he had established himself at Stirling as dictator to the young King and first man in his Council. James, sulky and resentful, found him continually at his elbow. His only refuge was the schoolroom, where Master Buchanan pursed his lips in distaste at the sound of the usurper's somewhat high-pitched querulous voice, and actually dared to remind the Earl that the King's education was not to be continually interrupted for affairs of state.

On this reminder the Earl usually withdrew, and James and his tutor were surprised to find themselves, for once in their career of mutual suspicion and dislike, entirely in sympathy. Their common detestation of the Earl of Morton infused at this period a new, though fleeting, cordiality into their relationship. But even George Buchanan could not prevent James from being continually exasperated by the presence of the ex-Regent, who prompted his speeches in Council, sat by his side at meals and even rode with him at the head of his armed retinue when he left the Castle to hunt.

And once the first months of Morton's return to politics had passed, the threatened opposition of various territorial lords died down. At Stirling, in possession of the King's person, he was not easily to be dislodged. The

Earl of Morton had cause to survey the state of affairs with pleasure. He had waited long for power and sheltered behind other men in the early days when to undertake the office of Regent was to offer oneself for target practice. Later he had even sacrificed the Regency, assumed at last, to placate the growing and tiresome wilfulness of the young King. But he had kept the power. And he thought he could manage James. As for opposition, he fancied he had that in hand. It was wonderful what a little discreetly laid out ready money did in a land where even the greatest noblemen seemed chronically short of cash. He began to allow himself a little leisure. Yes, he was safely installed now. He could relax a little, need not spend every other hour of the day in excessively boring association with a long-legged, sulky brat who had never a word to say for himself. His own affairs demanded all the attention he could spare from major matters of state.

So James was surprised but thankful to find himself allowed to come and go more freely. The formalities of the audience chamber did not interest the Earl, so James was sometimes allowed to entertain ambassadors of no special significance, and receive visits from the provincial lords of his own dominions, without Morton to help him.

James did not like these audiences. A company of strangers made him nervous, and he was afraid of saying the wrong thing. But, like the scrawling signature at the foot of state documents, his presence was a sign of power. It was pleasant to be allowed to do something without the Earl of Morton at his elbow to warn him in blustery whispers which reeked of his broken teeth and disordered stomach that this man was powerful and must be graciously treated, and that man of no consequence and might be dismissed with a nod. Morton's instructions

invariably irritated James into treating the lesser men graciously and behaving curtly to those he should have honoured, and so there was trouble afterwards as well. But when he was alone he smiled awkwardly at them all, for he was nervously eager to stand well with these men who swung so grandly into the Great Hall with their cold blue eyes and arrogantly tilted beards, inspecting him dispassionately while they knelt before him, as if they, not he, were royal.

One afternoon in September James was lounging as usual in his big chair at the end of the Hall, enduring an apparently unending audience. He swung his legs and wriggled, petulantly aware that his thin boy's body could still not fill the space between the carved arms. If he edged himself back till his shoulders touched the royal escutcheon knobbily carved behind him, his legs dangled out of reach of the velvet cushion laid for his feet on the top step of the brocade covered dais. If he pushed himself forward till he could plant his feet fairly on the cushion his back ached, unsupported. Either way was ignominious, and his dread of being laughed at irked like a prickle rash. Behind him flared the Scottish cloth of state, on either side were grouped the members of his Court, and an official at the foot of the steps read from a scroll the name and estate of the lord or gentleman bowing in the doorway and waiting for his sign to advance.

James played with the splendid dagger in its crimson sheath which had been one of his thirteenth birthday presents, along with the hound which lay at his feet, and the fine black horse with a crimson and gold saddle-cloth which waited for him in the stables. The droning voice of the official had ceased to have any meaning: the crowded Hall was airless and stifling with men's breath. James yawned, wearily, without raising his hand to cover his mouth.

"Your Highness . . ." The voice of the official was respectfully appalled.

James opened his eyes and jerked himself upright in his chair. He found himself looking directly at a tall stranger who was struggling unsuccessfully to check a smile as he knelt at the foot of the dais. But it was not the sort of smile that James disliked, for it was kindly rather than mocking, unlike those sly smirks which James so often surprised on the faces of his courtiers as he passed before them on state occasions, as if it were a specially good joke to see a small boy strutting about in the robes which belonged to a King. This man, on the contrary, smiled at him as a boy might smile when he had a secret to share. James leant forward, hastily wriggling to the edge of the big chair and setting his feet boldly on the cushion. He stared at the stranger, warily, as if uncertain of the friendliness he saw. Then diffidently, distrustfully, he too, began to smile. He held out his hand, and the tall man took it, not with chilly fingertips as the other courtiers did, but in a strong comforting grip which had nothing of the courtier in it at all, even when he bent to kiss it. As the head went forward and the strong moustache touched his knuckles James still stared at the crisply curling dark red hair, worn rather short after the French fashion, the back of the strong neck, the elegant but powerful shoulders, so smoothly encased in violet satin. A waft of fine perfume drifted towards him, and he felt slightly dizzy as the gay, bold eyes of Esmé Stuart, the exquisite, accomplished *Sieur D'Aubigny*, newly come to Scotland from the Court of France, were again raised to challenge his.

He was still holding *D'Aubigny's* hand, reluctant to lose the comfort and reassurance which seemed to come to him from those strong fingers. The words of greeting which he had already used twenty times that day and

knew so well by heart had utterly gone. He sat silent, while round him the gentlemen in attendance fidgeted and whispered, craning their necks to get a glimpse of what was delaying the usual sequence of presentations, anxious for it all to be done so that they could go. The official with the list of those seeking audience crackled his parchment and coughed, and the next arrival shuffled impatiently in the doorway, barred from entry by the crossed halberds of the phlegmatic men on guard.

Then James spoke, not by rote, but the first words which came into his head. "What are you smiling at?" he asked.

Esmé Stuart did not seem surprised. He gently disengaged his hand to point laughingly at the hound which lay with its muzzle on the velvet cushion. Its body was convulsed as if it were running hard on a scent, and little snuffling noises came spasmodically from its slightly parted jaws, between which showed the tip of a pink tongue.

"He has bad dreams," said the *Sieur D'Aubigny*.

"Is he dreaming?" James laughed too, and reached down to pull gently at the dog's soft ears. "Wake up, then. Wake up, poor fellow." He paused, while the hound sat up, shook his head and lifted a leg to scratch it. "You see, I have bad dreams, too," James explained.

Esmé Stuart nodded. "So have I, cousin."

"Have you? *Have* you? I thought I was the only one. They told me that I must not cry out——"

"What would they say to me, I wonder?" laughed the *Sieur D'Aubigny*. "I bawl murder, fire and witchcraft when evil dreams take me."

James gave a shout of laughter. The sudden sound roused the echoes of the Great Hall so strangely that he bit his lip and flushed. But Esmé Stuart was laughing with him, as unconcerned, in the midst of all the peering courtiers, as if they had been alone. James took courage

from his unconcern, and belatedly remembered some words of welcome.

"We are happy to see you at Stirling, my lord," he said with a prim little air of state. "And——" his eagerness broke through again, "you will stay here with us—for some time?"

"As your Highness commands." The Sieur D'Aubigny bowed. James could see the back of his neck again, where an over-zealously starched ruffle had chafed and reddened the skin, which was so fair, with its golden dusting of freckles. James winced. The sight of even a slight abrasion seemed to set another spot burning on the nape of his own neck, so strange and near was the instant sense of kinship that the sight of this glorious creature roused. He wished to keep him at his side for ever, to share his possessions with him so that he might not, unbearably, lack even the least thing. He wanted to take him away from this inquisitive circle of courtiers, who sneered as they served him, in order to ease the indignity of their service. This man did not sneer. He did not hold himself aloof. He had invaded with a single stride that frozen space of moon-silent loneliness which had surrounded James ever since the death of the Earl of Mar. He was a friend, he dared to laugh aloud in the faces of those unkind men and blank-faced women. Now that he had found him, they should no longer make him afraid.

"Shall I—can I take you to see the stables? I had a new horse for my birthday—If only I need not stay here——"

"Why should you?" Esmé Stuart pushed up his auburn moustache with his fingertips as he stooped to murmur: "Tell them that the audience is over. You are the King."

"Yes . . . but . . . " James looked round him uneasily.

"They can do nothing. You have only to be bold.

Stand up and speak loudly. They will not know you are afraid then. So your fear will not matter."

"But if they try to keep me?"

"Hold up your hand for silence. Then say, 'This is our wish!'"

"Dare I?"

"Of course. I will be here, beside you." The *Sieur D'Aubigny*, mischievously amused by his chance of setting the Scottish Court by the ears, waited with interest to see what the boy would do. James hesitated, gripping the arms of his chair and kicking at the cushion as he watched *D'Aubigny* under his heavy brows. Then all at once he made up his mind and pulled himself to his feet.

"The audience is over," he shouted, with all the violence of a nervous creature forcing himself to seem bold.

The Court was startled into attention. The men-at-arms, in the remote doorway, gaped. A murmur rose from the astonished groups, and the white-bearded official who had been busily running his finger down the remaining names on his list, trod on the edge of his furred gown and stumbled as he took a step up the dais and began to protest.

"But your Highness—there are many lords and gentlemen outside. I must remind——"

James shot an arm above his head. "Silence," he cried at the top of his uncertain young voice. Then, abashed at the sound of it, he added more quietly: "this is our wish."

Reluctantly the elderly Chamberlain bowed above his parchment, and all over the Hall the courtiers and their ladies bowed after him. Then they began to whisper and peer again, as they waited to see what James would do next.

James beamed. It had been so simple. He tumbled down the steps, his dog at his heels, and snatched at his

new friend's hand. "Now we can go to the stables," he babbled. "Quick, quick, we will go to the stables. You must see my new horse, and my hounds, and you must ride with me. Have you a horse?"

"My household is still at Leith," explained the Sieur D'Aubigny. "I outrode all but a couple of grooms on my way to your Court. As yet I have only hirelings."

"Then I shall lend you a horse," said James, as they went down the hall together, between the inquisitive, obsequious ranks. "No, I will *give* you one. I will give you the pick of my stables. You may choose any horse you wish, with everything needful, except only my black horse which is new. We will go together and see."

"You are too generous, cousin," smiled D'Aubigny, his hand on the boy's arm. "You must learn not to strip yourself for your friends."

"But this is different," said James, as they reached the doorway. "This has never happened before. You must let me give you things."

D'Aubigny smiled down at the boy.

"Be sure that I shall value your gifts," he said.

The heavy curtains were swung back from the doorway, the men-at-arms grounded their halberds in the punctilious clamour of the salute, and James passed out into the courtyard with his friend.

The tang of early frost quickened the aroma of the bonfire in which the Castle gardeners were clearing away the dead leaves and brittle sticks of the summer's flower spikes. James sniffed it and increased his pace as he led the way to the stables.

"You must make a long stay with us," he decided as they went together down the cobbled slope. "We shall show you some hunting, and you shall have the great chamber at the head of the staircase, and the bed with the crimson hangings that was my mother's——"



D'Aubigny glanced curiously at the boy, whose face had changed as he spoke of the Queen. He had no means of knowing, yet, the horrors by which his mother was surrounded in the boy's mind, nor that by putting this new and lovely friend in the room they still called hers, he sought to quiet the visions that troubled him.

In the stables D'Aubigny strolled with James from stall to stall, patting and appraising, discovering to his surprise that the young King had been well taught, and guessing that this place had been a refuge from the lonely grandeurs of his Court. He did not miss the affectionate pride of the old Master of the Stables as he watched James move among the horses; eagerly, with none of the awkwardness which characterised his movements in the formal publicity of the Hall.

"And this is my new horse. He is young, and sound, too. See his teeth." James put his hands about the muzzle and lifted the soft lip with a gentle thumb. The young horse rolled the whites of his eyes but did not stir. "Feel his muscle. Look at the bloom on his coat. We shall have many gallops, he and I." James laid his cheek against the sleek shoulder, then suddenly twisted his head round, away from the watching men.

"You—*you* can have him if you like," he said, suddenly gruff.

"No, indeed. I—I do not like the colour, fine though he is. Another will please me more," said D'Aubigny hastily. "Also I must have something which will carry me. I ride three times your weight, cousin. We must look for a beast with more bone, I think."

"Do you?" said James, still ready for the sacrifice, irresolute between disappointment and relief. "Do you *indeed*? He is yours if——"

"No, your Highness, it is true enough," said the Master of the Stables. "Come with me and we will find

something for my lord. I've a sixteen-hand gelding at the far end that'll do him fine."

"Come, cousin, that sounds more my mark," said D'Aubigny gaily. They went down the long line of stalls together, and James linked his arm with his in a glory of happiness which was backed by the more ordinary pleasure which he always took in the small noises of the stables; the dry, slithering sound of hay pulled from the racks by strong yellow teeth, the stamp and clang of hoofs on the cobbles, the hiss of men grooming sleek coats, the whine of a pump in the yard outside, the water clashing into the wooden buckets while the overflow gurgled away between the stones.

Here, at least, he might forget that he was the brow-beaten young King of an unruly, faction-distressed country, and become merely a boy busy with boys' affairs, lending a hand to saddle his own horse, discussing the prospects of the weather and the health of the hounds among bandy-legged men with knowing eyes and sun-burned faces who smelt of the horses they tended.

Esmé Stuart, pausing in the doorway to flick a few specks of dust from his fine satin sleeve, watched his young cousin with interest. This was a very different creature from the disconsolate, nervous boy who had lolled in the great chair below the cloth of state. Had James been a simple gentleman, able to choose the life he would lead, he might have been happy. As it was . . . Esmé Stuart scrubbed at the mark on the sleeve left by the too close pressure of his young cousin's hands, which had not apparently been recently washed, and was surprised to find himself so little concerned for the spoiling of his suit.

At the French court D'Aubigny had a considerable reputation for culture and beauty; for wit, where so many were witty; for elegance, where elegance was

almost commonplace. The brittle, heartless, self-seeking brilliance necessary for a courtier's career was second nature to him. He was weary of it. Partly from a desire for change, partly out of curiosity, partly because he had been spending, of late, too much money, he had accepted the commission offered by the house of Guise, and come to Stirling as their agent to do what he could to save the Catholic faith from extinction in heretic Scotland, to work for the restoration of Mary Stuart, and to find out the truth concerning the straitly guarded young monstrosity who had been set up as ruler in her place. For scandalous tongues, in France as well as in Scotland, had credited him with every conceivable deformity already.

He had come expectantly to Stirling and found no monster, only a boy so ruled and terrorised by pedants and brigands that his own shadow startled him, so lonely that his passionate response to friendliness constricted the heart, so balanced in his adolescence between the worlds of spirit and sense that he might either become a poet or a brute, a man of culture or a dry and lifeless pedant. He was, at that moment, ready for any man strong enough to make or mar, and the possibility of playing godfather to destiny could not fail to intrigue D'Aubigny, the poet.

So he stayed at Stirling, where he was remarkably unpopular. Neither he nor his retinue made any special effort to conceal the fact that they found the Scottish Court about as suited to gentlemen of rank and sensibility as a pig-stye on a back street. Their airs and elegance, the lace handkerchiefs held to their noses when certain individuals of ancient lineage and unchanged linen came too close, did not escape comment, and it was fortunate for D'Aubigny that he was an agile swordsman. For after he had ripped a few neat flesh wounds in his first unwary opponents he was challenged no more. But

the less athletic gentlemen in his service did not escape so lightly.

Johnny Mar, too, was disgusted at the completeness with which James had transferred his admiration to the newcomer. He sulked and began to tag about at the heels of Sir William Ruthven, Earl of Gowrie; Lord Lindsay, and other disgruntled noblemen who were anxious to persuade the Earl of Morton to send the Frenchman packing for home.

But the Earl of Morton shook his head and growled at them. How could D'Aubigny be dismissed to France when he had come as an ambassador from that important Court, and was, besides, in such high favour with the King? It was, of course, nothing but a childish fancy, which would pass. He himself had too much on his hands to concern himself with it. If it kept the boy quiet and happy, good. In point of fact, Morton had already realised that as the King grew, so his own power must wane. Once James was a grown man, the personal rule which was at present a polite fiction might become an actual fact. In the meantime, therefore, the more possessions he, Morton, could gather against future retirement, the better off he would be. And so he was not displeased to have inquisitive eyes turned elsewhere while he replenished his estates by every sort of taxation and extortion which his prudent mind could devise.

And James, at thirteen, was learning more willingly from his new hero than he had ever learned from Master Buchanan. D'Aubigny was a poet, and read him verses of his own composition; a hunter, with whom he rode for glorious days together; a diplomat, and within a few weeks James was ordering the royal progress to Edinburgh which Morton had unsuccessfully suggested before D'Aubigny's time.

It was to be a great occasion. James, who never noticed

what he wore, allowed D'Aubigny to order a complete new outfit. The Frenchman gave the problem careful thought; head on one side and lower lip pinched thoughtfully between finger and thumb as he considered the rival merits of white satin and crimson velvet for the royal costume. There was no doubt that white satin would delight the sentimental heart of every woman in Edinburgh. On the other hand, crimson velvet would give the thin boy a more mature and regal air. It all turned on whether it were better policy to emphasise his manliness or his youth.

D'Aubigny was interested in his own whole-hearted determination that the boy should have a triumph. It was a new oddity, this altruism, and quite amusing. He reached for a bundle of patterns and hummed a tune as he flicked them over. James, face downwards on the sheepskin rug, his fingers in his ears and his toes drumming the floor as he hammered out a sonnet, shook his head when consulted. This versifying had a strange fascination: he had set his heart on turning out poems like those that D'Aubigny read him in his deep, soft voice, poems that were as exquisite as thistledown, yet ballasted like such floating seeds with a potent germ of thought. James groaned: his own poems were like the pasties the Master Cook sent up when he had the belly-ache; sad, solid lumps without form or grace. D'Aubigny grinned and dangled his bundle of patterns in front of his cousin's nose.

"Curse you, man, what is it now?" said James, looking up with a smile that turned his words into a caress.

"Your outfit for Edinburgh," said D'Aubigny. "Come now, you must have some ideas. Time goes on and you will do nothing but mutter over your poems. I must order the stuff and have the tailors up——"

James rolled over on to his back and patted the front

of his ink-stained blue doublet. "*More* new clothes, Esmé? Do you want to turn me into a peacock? What's the matter with this suit? It was new a month ago."

D'Aubigny wrinkled his nose in distaste. "Yes, and it is ready for the ragman already. Look at the way you throw yourself about, lying on the rugs and playing with your dogs in the rushes." He leaned down to pull the boy's ear. "What's the matter with the poem?"

"I'm short of a rhyme," grumbled James.

"A common state among poets. What for?"

"Er—'effulgence,'" the boy admitted.

"Lord help us, cousin," protested D'Aubigny, shouting with laughter, "why must you use such words, let alone seek for rhymes to them? Use 'glory' instead, and you have half a dozen rhymes at your elbow. 'Story,' 'hoary' and——"

"Hoary will not do," objected James, "with you as my subject. Glory now, might. . . ."

D'Aubigny dropped his hand for an instant on James's thin shoulder, his expression an odd mixture of affection and concern. With a quick, shrugging movement James brushed his cheek against his cousin's carefully kept fingers, and turned shyly to touch them with his lips. Then, twisting himself to his feet, he ran towards the door.

"Cousin, cousin," shouted D'Aubigny, "is it to be white satin or crimson velvet?"

James, who had coloured to his ears, put his head back into the room. "Fustian, canvas or leather would be my choice. But satin or velvet is all one to me." He withdrew his head, and D'Aubigny could hear him go clattering down the stairs.

He had left the unfinished poem on the floor, and the older man picked it up, setting quill and inkhorn in a place of greater safety. As he read what James had written

his sensitive face was first gay then grave. Finally he sighed, and put the paper in an inner pocket. "He shall wear the white satin," he decided, as he stooped for his bundle of patterns, "and heaven send I can keep him from spotting it."

So it was decided, and the date of the visit to Edinburgh fixed for the 30th of September. James, with D'Aubigny, was to ride through the city, escorted by two thousand horsemen under James Stuart of Ochiltree, the handsome, ambitious Captain of the Guard. The Court was afterwards to take up residence at Holyroodhouse.

In the city of Edinburgh the news caused tremendous commotion. The Provost and his Council met in a flutter to decide on suitable pieces of silver plate (it was not thought necessary to talk of gold) for presentation, and drew up stringent instructions for the cleansing of the streets. All the great mounds of household filth which collected, week by week, in front of every door, were to be carted away, the impudent noisy swine banished from their sties under the forestairs, and driven to the back parts of the town before sunrise on the great day, no fowls were to be allowed out of doors in the High Street, and householders were to decorate their premises with discretion. Forestairs might be hung with tapestry or arras work of brilliant colours, but there were to be no vulgar masks or false noses worn by the general public to distract attention from the authorised mummers at strategic points on the route. Memories of previous tragedies made the Council also forbid any citizen to carry firearms, or any countryman to bring them farther than the city gates.

Andrew Haliburton was thankful that Walter had recently come home from Antwerp, for so much business passed through his hands during the weeks before the royal visitation that he had scarcely time to eat or sleep.

The chief citizens of the town were all ordering special costumes for the occasion, according to their rank, and every merchant was required to obtain a gown of fine black camlet, barred with velvet. Messengers from the thirteen city officers loudly demanded the English stemming and Rouen canvas required for their black and white livery, and white strings wanted for the black hats, while their wives took advantage of the general upset to demand more damask, brocade and taffeta than any woman could need for a single dress.

Walter and his father cut, measured and parcelled at top speed, shouting calculations to the sniffing Rob, who was hunched over the ledger. The years had changed Rob a great deal less than they had changed Walter, for Rob had always been an elderly young man with worried ways. But Walter had grown out of knowledge, though his straight hair was still the colour of silver sand, and he moved light-footed, like an athlete, in spite of his years of apprenticeship in Flemish warehouses.

The bustle amused him; his candid face was creased with smiles, and he gathered bits of information from the customers he served as a magpie collects bright fragments here and there. The young King was to be received at the West Port, in the shadow of the historic bulk of the Castle, by all the magistrates of the city under a pompous pall of purple velvet. At the West Bow, where they turned into the High Street, a great globe was to be hung, and as the King passed it would open and a small boy be let down from it to present the keys of the town.

"And every key of silver," said Walter, as he replaced a bolt of velvet on its shelf. "Musicians are to be massed there, so they say, dressed as Dame Music and her scholars."

"... and three ells of serge, Rob. Dame Music indeed, what silliness!" said Master Haliburton.



"Aye, but there's more to come yet," said the cheerful Walter. "In the High Street they've rigged up what they call the House of Justice, with orations by fine ladies dressed as Peace, Justice, Plenty and Policy, no less. Dame Religion stands outside the Collegiate Church, and Bacchus himself holds state at the Mercat Cross, with liquor running from the fountain for all passers-by."

"I doubt there's few will get past at all at that rate," said Andrew Haliburton, busy with the shears.

"And the crowds will be enough to suffocate a body," complained his wife, who had come down to lend a hand at the counter in the hope of getting her household the sooner upstairs to their supper. "You can do what suits you, Andrew, but I shall stay at the head of my own fore-stair where I can keep an eye on my gear. Every rapscallion for fifty miles round will be in the streets with his fingers idle."

"I'll stay at home too," said Andrew Haliburton. "You'll be off to the Mercat Cross, Walter, I suppose?"

But Walter shook his head. "Not me. I've had enough of crowds these years in Antwerp. Mad crowds of soldiers and hangers-on that pleased the Spanish Governor by breaking windows of Protestants' houses. I've no taste for crowds nowadays. I'll bide here and see them pass below."

"We'll need food laid in, Margaret," said the merchant. "There'll be no stirring once the streets are thronged."

"That is all thought on already, Andrew," said his wife calmly. "Is there any more stuff to measure? I've set the wench to stir the broth, and she has no head left on her shoulders with the commotion. If it is not to be burned useless I must go."

"We'll not be far behind you," Andrew Haliburton called after her. "There's nothing like good business for the appetite. We've made enough already to set against the holiday next week."

So said many complacent traders as they counted their takings during those busy days. Visitors streamed into Edinburgh for the great occasion. Every house which had room to spare offered to lodge a stranger, and men from all over the country slept in rows on the floors of those who had given them house-room and supper for a few pence. But Andrew Haliburton refused to admit any one. His wife had work enough and the money could go to those who needed it. He condemned lodgers as more trouble than they were worth, eating like fattened beasts and setting off the next morning with some of your spoons in their pouches, as likely as not.

The day before the progress found the civic preparations incomplete, and joiners worked far into the night with torches to guide the hammers which kept the citizens awake. Next day, when the city gates were flung back at sunrise, half the countryside seemed to stream in. It was a typical September morning, cold enough to set those out of doors muffling their plaids round them as they waited, but with a cloudless sky and sunshine strong enough to melt the hoar frost off the roof-tops.

Long before the procession was due to turn into the Royal Mile the shouts of the crowd at the West Port who saw it winding towards the city in the distance brought out the owners of galleries and forestairs on the route, shielding their eyes as they peered down the sunlit perspective of swaying citizens who waited expectantly for the first salute from the Castle guns.

Master Brodie, a little thinner and drier for the passing years, but with the same zealot's fervour, stood with the Haliburtons and strained his short-sighted eyes for the blessed sight of the Lord's anointed. The wave of sound rose triumphantly as the procession entered the city, was drowned in the thunder of the Castle guns, mounted again as it wound up to the head of the Bow, near the

Haliburtons' steps. A young man on a fine chestnut mare was trotting ahead with a detachment of soldiers, clearing the way with imperious gestures.

"That's Stuart of Ochiltree," said Walter with interest. "He's a great man these days, Captain of the King's Guard, but he and I were at the school together for all that. They say that the King thinks——"

The rest of the sentence was drowned in the roaring of the crowd. A boy in white satin was riding past, a pace ahead of the smiling man in black, who was reining back his impatient horse so that the boy should be alone in his triumph.

James sat his beast carefully, elbows in, heels down, back straight. He had been carefully schooled, it seemed, for he looked kingly, and grave citizens nodded their approval to each other while the women smiled as the boy's happiness and pride broke through every now and then in an extra twirl of his cap, a grin or a prod of the blunt silver spurs which sent his docile horse sidling towards the crowd.

It only lasted for a few seconds; then they were past, with all the Court behind them, and the excited crowd below were closing in at a safe distance from the last horse's hoofs. The yelling diminished, died down to a distant hubbub as the sightseers surged down the Canon-gate to watch the King alight at Holyroodhouse.

After the meal Walter and his father went down the stairs and into the littered street, which was now so curiously empty and silent after the recent loyal pandemonium. In the distance they could still hear the shouts rising round Holyroodhouse. From the wooden galleries and forestairs the bright tapestries and carpets hung askew, though here and there thrifty housewives were already shaking and folding them up for safety against the next great occasion. The cobbles at either side, where

the central paving ended, were silted deep in rubbish left by the crowd; the bright cloths waved for the passage of the King had been dropped and left where they fell once the moment was over; crusts of bread, apple-cores, old shoes, little plaster images of a boy on a big horse, which the hucksters had hawked round the waiting sight-seers, had been forgotten and tramped into the mud with half-eaten pies and bones chewed bare by people who had come out of their lodgings with their breakfast in their hands.

Andrew Haliburton shook his head at the sight. "A herd of bullocks would scarcely leave the High Street in such a turmoil as the good citizens of Edinburgh out for a holiday," he grumbled. "It will take the scavengers long enough to redd it up. Have a look at the shutters and latches, Walter, that nothing's been tampered with." He fumbled for the bunch of keys at the waist-belt of his Sabbath doublet, and led the way into the shadowy booth. Once inside he carefully stripped off the velvet-barred gown of ceremony, folded it, lining uppermost, and bestowed it in one of the chests, and while Walter flung back the shutters of the stuffy little booth he took his russet gown of everyday from its peg behind the wall.

"Aye, I feel the better for that," the merchant said as he shrugged his shoulders into its familiar folds. "I am never at ease in my fine clothes for the trouble it gives me to think of the crowd pushing and spoiling them with its dirty fingers. Now, is there anything gone astray? Are the latches sound?"

"Sound enough," said Walter, looking round him. "And everything of value we locked in the chests overnight." He crossed the booth and jerked at the lids. "They're locked yet. All's safe."

"And that's a comfort," said his father. "Since one thief, breaking in, might carry off a year's profit on his

back, if he had the skill to recognise the best stuffs. It is a foolish way to keep our gains always about us, as we do, showing our prosperity in the number of silver platters and gilded cups that stand on our sideboards. I am close on sixty, Walter, and I'll not be needing these things much longer. I'd like to see you do something better with your inheritance than spend your days in this same booth cutting cloth for the gentry. You'll have fine chances, all the revenues from the Antwerp business that's escaped the Spaniards, your own ships that you'll send out East and West, underlings to sell for you while you yourself buy land, bear arms, become a great man at the Court with estates up and down the country and a title to be carried on by your sons."

Walter smiled apprehensively, shaking his head. "I haven't much taste for the grand things," he said. "Though I'd like the land well enough, if they left me in peace to farm it. But they'll never make a lord of me, I doubt."

He perched on the counter, the powerful muscles of shoulders and thighs smoothly relaxing under his closely fitting doublet and hose as he let himself slide comfortably back on one elbow, grinning up at his father.

"You are nothing but a great lazy hulk," grumbled Andrew Haliburton. "It should not be I who make the plans, but you. Where's your ambition, man?"

"I don't know, sir," said Walter amiably. "I haven't much. But what are your plans for me? I'll do what I can."

Andrew Haliburton ran his fingers through the wiry curls of his beard and considered his son. "There is a King at Holyrood again. And a Court to be served. There might be chances for a clever lad, in the Garderobe, for instance. From that, who knows what might come?"

"Ihmhm," grunted Walter doubtfully. "I might ask

a favour of Ochiltree, if he is not too grand to see me nowadays."

"Good. Good," nodded the merchant. "Get him to find you a place. And if that fails I'll have a word myself with the Clerk of the Garderobe for the sake of all the business we've done together. Mind you now, Walter, many men have won to great things from smaller beginnings than a place in the Garderobe."

"I am not yet there," Walter pointed out. "Still, I'll go and see Ochiltree. But not to-day. They are all still yelling about the Palace, and the King's officers will be far too busy knocking heads together to spare an ear for me. I will go to-morrow."

"Soon enough," agreed his father. "And now the shutters must be barred, for heaven only knows who will be astray again in the streets after dark."

But nightfall found the crowd still about the Palace, kept out of the forecourt, indeed, by barred gates and threatening halberds, for the officers had too keen a memory of the methods of assassins to risk even such an innocently happy gathering within shooting distance of its King.

So they all stood outside the gates, climbed on each others' shoulders to cling and peer over the wall, shouting and cheering, one leg astride the coping-stones, till the soldiers poked them from their vantage points with the butt-ends of their pikes, so that they fell back yelling, "Welfare to the King," into the arms of the crowd which roared with laughter as it received them.

Within the Palace, James rose for the tenth time from the supper table under the great central constellation of candles, and pranced excitedly towards the nearest lattice. One of the Councillors made a movement to check him.

"Your Highness, I pray that you will not show yourself again——"

James thrust against him imperiously, stamping his foot. "Indeed, you shall not stop me from waving my bonnet to my people," he said. "Let me pass."

"Let him go, my lord Lindsay," drawled D'Aubigny, from his place at the board. "They will not hurt him. I have known too many crowds to fear this one. It is half-crazed with joy to have a King again."

James was already at the lattice, leaning out, swinging his satin cap with its white plume round his head, shouting a greeting which was lost in the answering roar. Torches tossed up and down, scattering light and shadow on the perspective of upturned faces.

The very glasses on the supper-table rang with it. D'Aubigny smiled as he poured himself out more claret, then held out his arms to fend off James's headlong rush back from the lattice which Lord Lindsay and Sir James Melville had at last succeeded in closing against him.

The boy's face was scarlet with excitement and delight, his voice hoarse from his attempts to make his greeting heard. He flung himself on his friend, both arms about his neck, embracing him almost to strangulation, while the glass of claret tottered on the shaken table and sent a deep stain across the damask cloth and James's white satin trunks.

"Steadily, steadily," smiled D'Aubigny, fending him off. "See, you have spilt the wine."

But James had no thought for such trifles, and neither eyes nor ears for the tolerant, watching lords. For him there was only Esmé, Esmé to understand, Esmé to advise, Esmé to love. They shared this triumph together, they alone. "Listen, listen," he exulted. "They are shouting for *me*! They are my people." He laughed, shakily, his cheek against his friend's lean jaw. "I am so happy, man, so happy. What a king I'm going to be!"

## CHAPTER TEN

THE COURT HAD SPENT THE WINTER at Holyrood, and the routine of State affairs began to play its part in steadying James from his dizzy delight in his newly discovered popularity. The crowds which at first hung about Holyrood all day long in the hope of a glimpse of their King as he rode out to hunt or walked in his garden began to thin away as the people of Edinburgh became accustomed to the fact that their King was actually among them, growing to manhood with their own young sons, taking the government of the distressed country into his hands and promising peace and prosperity. He was not their King alone, but even, men were beginning to say, the next King to rule England, too. For was not the English Queen nearing fifty, without husband or heir? It was a proud thought. Here was a better way of conquest than by battery and bloodshed. James was not only their King, but their hope, their glory. Patriotic Scotsmen strutted a little as they went about their affairs.

And James, busy with his ministers at the paper-strewn Council board, furrowed his brows as he groped after understanding, and set himself to learn more of this business of kingship. His power extended to greater matters than the signing of documents: he could make or mar a man's fortunes at his pleasure. He could give titles, and great estates of Scottish land as well. This was a new delight.

He studied the matter with care, asked questions of his lawyers, began to experiment. He had given Esmé Stuart jewels and trinkets, a horse, a pretty dagger in a cunning sheath like a snake. He would now give him the



earldom of Lennox, the title which had lain dormant since his grandfather's death.

"Tell me, Esmé, how do you like the sound of 'Earl of Lennox'?"

They were walking in the long gallery of Holyrood together, while outside the casements the first snow of December whirled and fluttered. D'Aubigny laid an arm across the boy's shoulders as they went. "It sounds well, cousin, though 'Duke of Lennox' might possibly sound better, don't you think?"

"Much better. But there is no such dukedom——"

"But there might be," said D'Aubigny cheerfully, "if the King were pleased to create it."

James gave a little skip of excitement. "Yes, indeed. Why not? I can. I can. I am the king. The lawyers may hum and haw, but they will have to do as I wish. But we will take one fence at a time, cousin. First the Earl of Lennox, and then——"

"Who is this nobleman that you have made out of thin air?" demanded D'Aubigny with a quizzical air.

"Not such thin air," laughed James, punching gaily at his friend's ribs.

"And do I know him well?"

"None better."

"And like him?"

"Well enough. *I* like him more, though."

"Show me this fellow that you favour so," cried D'Aubigny in mock rage, "and I will spoil his beauty so that you will never look his way again."

James twisted himself free and doubled up in a fit of laughter, rolling about the gallery in joyous, spluttering bouts of mirth. "I cannot do that, I cannot do that," he said weakly. "He is the one person at Court whom nobody can show you but your mirror, my lord of Lennox."

Suddenly formal, D'Aubigny went down on one knee, and James's laughter died to consternation as he took him by the hands to pluck him up again. "*You*—must not kneel to me," he said. "I would give you all that I have. You are my friend."

But D'Aubigny still knelt, smiling at the boy's embarrassment with deep and grave affection. "I am your friend indeed," he said. "Yet also, and for as long as we live, I am your Highness's most faithful servant."

James pulled him to his feet, rubbing his head against his cousin's shoulder like a shy and grateful pony. "I have had many servants," he said, "and never a friend before."

"Soon you will have many," said the new Earl.

"No," said James. "If they take you from me, I shall never have so dear a friend again." His face puckered. He looked afraid, as if he had learned to fear happiness more than misery, because it was less durable.

"Why, cousin," said D'Aubigny, tweaking James's ear, "who shall try to part us? You are the King."

"Yes," said James, with a little sigh of relief. "I had forgotten. Yes, I am the King. Come, Esmé, quick. Let me show you the documents I signed. They are with that long-faced man who guards all the State papers. We must get him before he goes to his dinner, for he locks the chamber behind him with a great key, and even if I were King of England I could not order it to fly open at my touch."

"Would you like to be King of England, cousin?" said D'Aubigny as they went down the great stair, arms linked.

"Yes," said James promptly. "They have no King there now. My godmother is Queen. She writes me letters and says I must mind my tutors. But she does not say why. Is that why, Esmé?"

"Perhaps," smiled Esmé Stuart.

The winter went on at Holyrood. It was the gayest winter James remembered, with balls and receptions and banquets, hunting-parties and progresses through the city, the new Earl of Lennox always at his elbow to help and prompt him with his good-humoured tact. James saw more of his Household than he had done at Stirling, and was soon on good terms with his Captain of the Guard, young Ochiltree, who was proud and fierce but excellent company, since he was neither grave nor old.

He was good-natured enough, too, in a lordly way, to his former school-fellow, Walter Haliburton, who appeared at the Palace so evidently expecting (and indeed, positively hoping) to be sent home with a flea in his ear, that Ochiltree took some little trouble to prove him wrong. So when the Court moved, the following spring, back to the Castle at Stirling, Walter went with the rest of the household, in the humble capacity of assistant to the Clerk of the Garderobe.

But the Clerk, who was getting on in years, found the young man so skilful with his pen that he handed over to him the daily sheaf of items to be checked and listed, while he folded his own hands on his stomach in great content and drowsily watched Walter's great shoulders hunched over the heavy books at the trestle table. The room was warm from the wood fire and stuffy from the drifting motes of cloth, but shot through occasionally with icy draughts, for the broiderers came in and out, demanding skeins of silk, the launderers made their continual requests for that new-fangled starch which saved them the trouble of wiring ruffles, and the pages brought orders from their masters. One and all seemed incapable of shutting a door behind them and were merely impudent when reminded of it.

The Clerk of the Garderobe drew his stool into the angle of the chimney and tilted it back against the warm brick.

Let the boy work for a change: had *he* not worked all his life? So he dozed, murmuring occasionally, like a bumble-bee, useful expedients for keeping the moth out of winter garments or removing the stains of wine. From the room beyond came the jabber of the tailors at work, the click and rattle of their irons, and the warm smell of singed cloth. Walter's wrist began to ache, as he neared the bottom of the Earl of Lennox's list of orders, which was the longest and costliest at Court. The Earl, he told himself, was the sort of man with taste as well as extravagance who would have delighted his father's heart. He wondered, as he paused to rub his wrist, whether it were true, as they said in the Hall, that the Kirk was already railing against him because he was a Catholic, and he had offered to change his religion to silence them.

Esmé Stuart, Earl of Lennox, was, as it happened, not a religious man. He had a habit of surveying the seething ministers of the Kirk with a detached amusement worthy of Lethington himself in the old days, and had brought the whole hornet's nest about his ears by describing the Scottish churchmen, with mild interest, as "men of curious minds." Naturally, some one made it his business to repeat the phrase to the ministers concerned, and it was never forgotten. John Knox might be dead, but his successor, Andrew Melville, preacher and patriot, was a man of desperate courage, fanatic conviction, and no humour whatever. Unfortunately, neither Lennox nor Ochiltree, now beginning to show signs of ruling Scotland, realised the genuine determination and endurance which underlay the slightly theatrical thunderings of the Kirk.

These two, Lennox and Ochiltree, shared one interest, which was James, and one objective, the destruction of the Earl of Morton. Ochiltree's reasons were purely personal; he was ambitious, and Morton, with his

exasperating economies and subservience to England (where the money came from) stood in his way. The new Earl of Lennox had other, less personal reasons for the extermination of the foxy Morton. He had come to the Scottish Court to see what could be done to bring back its exiled Queen. He was in communication with Mary in her English prison, he was warily working his way towards a rising of the Catholic Earls; and he found Morton, that influential, wealthy Protestant tool of England, set square across his path. Morton, then, must go.

Remained to plan the manner of his exit; for the usual assassination would not serve, as the Earl pointed out to Ochiltree in conference. Morton must also be discredited, his influence as well as his life destroyed, for he would be even more troublesome as a martyr than he had been as a man. It was easier said than done, but meanwhile Lennox, that finished diplomat, discovered and nourished James's detestation of his intended victim, since this seemed likely to come in useful in due course, and steadily gained power over national affairs. He became first a member of the Council, then Lord Chamberlain, and as he rose the rumblings of opposition rose with him, in spite of all his tact and skill.

He was well aware of them, and they caused him some anxiety, for he had not yet accomplished half his mission at the Scottish Court, and the completion of it was beginning to seem a greater problem than he had at first supposed.

He had won the love and confidence of the King, and found himself surprisingly touched by it. He had even allowed himself to be persuaded to turn Protestant, to please James with the success of his arguments and to quiet the clamour of the Kirk. But he had not succeeded in correcting James's early impressions of his mother.

Every time he brought up the subject of her wrongs James shied away from it. The associations were too entangled with his early nightmares, the railing of George Buchanan, and the sniggering whispers of the other boys during lessons on contemporary Scottish history, for the topic to be tolerable. So the Earl of Lennox, unwilling to seem inquisitive, bided his time, and contrived, now and then, to have James bring up the subject himself.

One day James discovered a cunningly wrought gold locket which his friend was wearing round his neck on a fine chain. James, who had been leaning on his friend's shoulder, digging with his chin at the foppish shoulder-padding of the Earl's crimson velvet doublet, was teasing him over his dandified ways and the fourth new suit in a week. He reached for the locket and sniffed.

"Why, it's scented," he said. "What a cunning toy."

Lennox, busy with a sheaf of documents, moved the ink-horn and sand out of range of James's sweeping movements. "Against the plague," he explained. "Stuffed with the essence of sweet herbs." He twitched the chain from about his neck and gave it to James, who perched on the arm of his chair and began to investigate it, while he himself appeared to return to the disentanglement of the legal phraseology before him.

James was quiet for a few minutes, sniffing and fidgeting with the clasp which opened one side of the locket. But presently his attention was caught by something else. An accidentally touched spring had opened another compartment, into which he stared, astonished.

"Esmé," he said at last, "whose is this portrait?"

"Some one," said the Earl, without looking up from his papers, "that I knew at the Court of France."

"It is a lovely face——"

"No mere painter could ever catch her as she was," said Lennox.

"Was? Is she dead then?"

"A prisoner. To her, the same."

"Then—who—?"

"The Queen, your mother," said the Earl, pretending to scrawl corrections.

"Oh. They had not told me she was—beautiful."

"They would not."

"But she would want to rule Scotland instead of me if she were free. I should not like that."

"You might rule Scotland together, mother and son. Would that not please you?"

"Perhaps. Why does the Queen of England keep her prisoner instead of letting her go home?"

"The Queen of England knows that many people say she has a better right to rule England than Elizabeth herself."

"Better than I would have if my godmother died?" said James quickly.

"Yes. As your mother she comes first. But you are her heir."

"I—see," said James. He pushed the locket away from him along the table-top. It bumped against the heavy paper-weight and back again towards the Earl.

Lennox picked it up and held it out to James. "Keep it, if you like," he said, with elaborate carelessness. "You have a better right than mine, after all. It will be a novelty in the Court, too, with its scent and its secret."

But James shook his head. "I do not want it. Esmé, come and see if the brindled bitch has whelped yet. She should have a fine litter. I chose her mate myself from all the pack."

Lennox sighed. The conversation had ended, like so many others, up a blind alley.

But if he failed to rouse James's interest in his mother, his campaign against the ex-Regent, Morton, met with

more success. He felt that it would soon be time to put matters to the touch, for James's friendship had given him a position as yet unchallenged in the country, and if his conversion to Protestantism had not convinced the Kirk, it had at least deprived its ministers of one of their most obvious grounds of complaint. By the end of 1580, when he had been at the Scottish court for a year and three months, the Earl had everything in train and took the delighted James into his confidence.

In due course Ochiltree was also primed, and the Council met on the last day of the year, unaware of the drama to be staged for them presently, with James, eager as a flame, presiding, barely controlled by Lennox's eloquently warning, affectionate eyes.

Round the board sat the great lords; Argyle, Angus, Lindsay, and the rest. James lounged in his chair at the head of the table, with Lennox, as Lord High Chamberlain, on his right hand, as cool and indifferent as James himself tried to be, while he listened to the droning voice of Lord Lindsay proposing some minor measure and tried to keep his eyes off the Earl of Morton, composedly picking his teeth at the far end of the room.

The ordinary course of business proceeded, and James, always impatient, began to fret for fear that something had gone wrong. But the Earl of Lennox seemed calm, so perhaps it was all right. The Earl of Morton was saying something about the possibilities of extra taxation to be spread over the next five years to replenish the Exchequer, and James tried not to grin. If all went well, the Earl of Morton would no longer be so greatly concerned by the chance of pocketing a substantial share of the returns. *If* all went well. . . .

It was at that moment that a crashing knock on the doors of the Council chamber turned all heads one way. Brushing aside the usher, who was advancing to entreat



an audience for the Captain of the Guard, Ochiltree, fully armed, stepped within, and clanked down the room towards the King.

Protests were shouted at him from all sides, but his business was with James. He knelt beside him, bare-headed, suppliant.

"What brings you here, Captain?" said James, trying to keep the exultation out of his voice.

"Your Highness," said Ochiltree, "I come to make an accusation, to appeal for justice to the King and his Lords in Council——"

"It is an outrageous interruption. . . ."

"Send the fellow out. . . ."

"He must be demented. . . ."

James held up his hand for silence. "I give you permission to speak." His voice was steady now.

"Then, your Highness, and my Lords," said Ochiltree, "I charge that man sitting yonder——" His long arm shot out and every head turned, as if it had been on a string, towards the astounded man at the far end of the long table. "I charge James Douglas, Earl of Morton, with High Treason——"

The Council was too startled for coherent speech. Ochiltree raised his voice to dominate the commotion.

"——High Treason, since he was privy to the murder of King Henry, the beloved father of our Sovereign Lord."

The Earl of Morton was on his feet, his stool going down behind him with a crash. "Your Highness," he blustered, "you will not listen to such a monstrous statement. This fellow is not of rank—I am not bound to answer him—let him be dismissed—punished. This accusation is mere petty malice——"

"I notice you do not call it *false*, my lord of Morton," said James.

"False?" roared the Earl of Morton, "be sure it is false. What else could it be but false? I have served——"

"If it be false," shouted Ochiltree against him, "why then did the Earl of Morton prefer his cousin, that Archibald Douglas, whom all men knew to be guilty, as a Senator of the College of Justice?"

The question drove Morton beyond all bounds of discretion. He did the most foolish thing he could have done; he drew his sword and rushed upon the kneeling Ochiltree in a red-headed fury, with the mad and desperate purpose of silencing him on the spot. But Ochiltree was not a soldier for nothing, and he had stood closer to death often enough in his time. He was on his feet in an instant, his sword flickering from its sheath to clash with that of the Earl of Morton. The two men circled, battling, in a flurry of scattered papers, overturned stools and scrambling Councillors. Lord Lindsay was the first to regain some sort of presence of mind. He flung himself between the combatants, striking their swords upwards with his own, shouting for those nearest to pinion them from behind, to summon the guard, to clear the room and keep both men under arrest while the matter was discussed.

Lennox, who had drawn James away from the turmoil into the window embrasure, now led him back to his place and hoisted his overturned chair upright again. Men went stooping about the chamber in search of papers, threw the broken stools into corners and called for others. Finally, the scandalised Council recovered sufficiently to confer over the cause of the uproar. It was a curious conference, for every one present knew that there was more in the accusation than at first appeared, and many suspicious eyes were turned on the bland Lennox, who most correctly refused to record his own vote on Ochiltree's accusation, since personal

enmity should not prejudice the course of public justice. The Lords were puzzled. Why cause an accusation to be brought and then refuse to support it? Here was too nice a distinction for their understanding. But finally they ordered that the Earl of Morton should be removed to confinement in the Castle till he could be brought to trial.

It was six months before the case was heard. Elizabeth of England did what she could to save a valuable agent. She sent an army to the Border, ready to co-operate with the Protestant lords, who, it was to be supposed, would rise to defend their one-time Regent. But she had reckoned without Morton's unpopularity. He had trodden on too many toes in his time of power for any one to come to his assistance in this extremity. Besides, he was serving now in something of the capacity of a scapegoat. Few of the chief men in the kingdom had a sufficiently untroubled conscience to defend him and risk an inquiry into their own motives for siding with a man accused of High Treason. And the ministers of the Kirk saw no reason to rouse the people. They had not forgotten the earlier matter of appropriated stipends.

So on the first of June, 1581, the Earl was tried for his share in the Darnley murder of fourteen years before. On the same day he was found guilty, and on the next he was taken to execution. The proceedings provided an interesting demonstration both of the dilatoriness and the expedition of Scottish justice. On the scaffold the Earl showed himself as voluble and pious in his speeches as the tradition of the times demanded and the excited, holiday mob which swayed and fought round the Mercat Cross of Edinburgh could have hoped. Probably the lively apprehension of what must happen as soon as he could find no more to say moved him to special eloquence. As he worked up to his peroration he beat his corded

wrists on the rail and the small sound could be heard at the farthest rim of the breathless, tiptoe crowd.

"Alas, my friends," cried the Earl of Morton, in the words of a greater man than himself, "it is for my sins that God has justly brought me to this place, for if I had served my God as truly as I did my King, I had not come here."

On the steps of the scaffold, Ochiltree, newly created Earl of Arran, did not trouble to conceal the grin which showed his strong white teeth, and the executioner plucked his oratorical victim impatiently by the sleeve.

"Let him have his say," chuckled the Earl of Arran. "It will be long enough before he gets such another audience."

But it was over at last. The weighted knife of the Maiden, that counterbalanced blade in its gibbet-like contrivance, was released, shuddered a little, and fell. The head of the Earl of Morton was set with those of other criminals, upon one of the spikes of the Tolbooth, and James went back to dine with Lennox and Arran in Holyrood. It was a riotous occasion; for all their troubles seemed dead and dismembered with Morton, and they sat late into the night discussing how they should rule Scotland together.

But Ochiltree, now Earl of Arran, was too dominant a character to be content with second place, while for James there would never be any one like Lennox. So the perfection of the year which followed the removal of Morton was marred a little by occasional scenes, and dispassionate observers nodded to each other over the signs of storm which were visible now and then, as on the formal opening of Parliament in the autumn of 1581, when Arran furiously questioned the right of Esmé Stuart, created Duke of Lennox only that summer, to precede him as they both followed the King.

As it happened, however, the trouble eventually came from another quarter. Arran's jealousy of Lennox did not threaten the friendship as nearly as the jealousy of the Protestant lords, who saw in the supremacy of James's two friends a threat to their own grandeur, even to their lands. Who could believe that Lennox and Arran would be satisfied with what they had been given? Presently they would begin to take what they could get. Was it not what they would have done themselves, given such golden opportunities?

Meanwhile, out of sight and hearing of those at Court, the ministers, who had not saved Morton, were rousing themselves to destroy Lennox. The humbler circles, in which honest citizens moved, were already noisy with the resentment spread by their preachers, and Walter Haliburton, granted an evening's leave of absence by his master in the Garderobe, found Master Brodie before him at the supper-table, with lifted hand and glaring eyes, calling down the wrath of Heaven upon that Popish miscreant, the Duke of Lennox.

"He has come into our fair Protestant country like a worm into a bud," cried Master Brodie, "to devour all the sweetness of religion with his accursed superstitions, to win the young King away from the true faith to the uncleanness of Babylon, to persuade error into the hearts of the great men of the land so that yon Popish woman, the King's mother, may be set over us again with the help of France and Spain. It must not be, I tell you," shrilled the minister, pounding on the board till the tin vessels jumped and clinked, "we will rather die than see Popery supreme in the land again."

"It may be that he does not wish to see it himself," said Andrew Haliburton mildly. "Has he not made confession of the Protestant faith?"

"Pah!" spat out Master Brodie. "We are not to be

hoodwinked by the protestations of a man who changes one faith for another as he might change his shoes."

"What sort of a man is he close at hand, Walter, this Duke of Lennox?" asked the merchant's wife, as she cut rounds of bread and speared it to the men on the point of the knife. "He looks kind and gentle, or so it seems from a distance."

"He is well enough thought of by those that serve him," mumbled Walter, who was eating in haste, since he must be back at the Palace when the second watch was set. "He has great love for the King, it seems, and not only for what he may get."

"And Arran?" asked his father.

Walter grinned. "Oh, *him*! The lords scoff as they speak of him by his title, and some will not use it at all, since they consider him a commoner still, in spite of it."

"A jumped-up body, eh?"

"That's about it. But he's more trouble to us in the Garderobe than half a dozen of the rest. Our lives are made a misery with his complaints. His coats have always been too hastily pressed, and his ruffles are not in order, or his hose have been darned to chafe his heels. The Duke of Lennox must have every least thing right; but he goes differently about it. Now this Ochiltree, it seems as if he must show us that he knows we are out to cheat him and he will see that we do not."

"That is the way of them, those beggars in high places," nodded the merchant. "I have many of them in my shop, twitching over my finest stuffs as if they were rags, always afraid that I will seek to sell them short measure. What has the Kirk to say of my lord of Arran, Matthew?"

"He is a vainglorious man whose pride will be brought low, and without any religion, which is to say only a little less abhorrent to God than Lennox, who is a Papist

set by the house of Guise to lead the King astray," said Master Brodie fiercely.

"It is to be hoped," said Andrew Haliburton, "that the ministers will be content to leave these matters to be settled by God in His own good time, and not seek to stir up the people to deal with them by force."

"God will arise and scatter his enemies," said the minister. "And if the Kirk must preach a holy war against them, it will show backsliders no mercy." He glared at the merchant, his thin white hair standing truculently up round his head. "Where is your spirit, man?"

"Matthew," said Andrew Haliburton, "in the matter of war, there is no spirit left in me. I will not be dragged into other men's quarrels by the hair of the head. I have had my bellyful of fighting. If the lords of the Council, our rulers, have quarrels to settle, let them take sword themselves, while the common people watch their betters bleed and not their sons."

"Aye, their sons," cried Master Brodie, whirling on Walter. "Here's a lad who would take up arms as the Kirk bade him!"

But Walter shook his head slowly. "I would rather know something of what I was called on to do, than be loosed ravening on a quarry like a hound after buck."

"Think shame on yourself, boy," said the preacher.

"There is something in what he says, Matthew," interrupted the merchant.

"Then it is as well for Scotland that more do not think like him. Or I should not be able to stir the young men to support the holy cause of the Kirk as I do."

"No," said Andrew Haliburton, "not many of those who were children while their fathers killed each other in the streets of Edinburgh will have learned enough from that killing to demand peace now. You will find

plenty of brands to kindle with your burning, more's the pity."

"Be careful, Andrew," flashed the old minister, "that you are not a brand for a more dreadful burning yourself."

"As to that, neither you nor I can tell," said the merchant good-humouredly. "Nor can you be sure that the Lord will bless this trouble that you are seeking to stir up now."

"We, the ministers of Christ's Kirk, are the best judges of His will," retorted Master Brodie.

And throughout the summer he and his fellow ministers did their best to stir up that discontent among the people of which James, holding his Court at Holyrood, was innocently unaware. He was utterly happy in the companionship of Lennox, whom he loved and steadily preferred before the bold and domineering Arran with all his insolent charm.

James had grown and developed rapidly in the years of their friendship. He was nearing his sixteenth birthday, a tall boy with an eager brilliant curiosity and a singular sweetness of expression, now that he seemed to have outgrown the terrors of his childhood. Hunting was one of his passions, but so was verse-making, and the study of languages, and astronomy, and Esmé was teaching him the music of several instruments. In fact, life was glorious with the things which Esmé was teaching him, so that affairs of state were attended to in record time and thankfully dismissed after he had done what Esmé or Arran advised on behalf of the Council. After all, with Esmé as his Lord High Chamberlain, what could possibly go wrong?

In the opinion of the Duke's gathering company of enemies, however, quite a number of things could, and it was the business of all good patriots to stop them. Johnny Mar, for instance, was to be seen constantly



about with the Earl of Gowrie, who was Treasurer, and had lately quarrelled with Arran, and round them the Protestant lords were beginning to gather, whispering. The Kirk, always on the outlook for the detested Popish influence, continued to denounce the advances of the house of Guise from every available pulpit, and were roused to somewhat disproportionate indignation by the news of a fine present of six horses sent to James by the Duke of Guise early in May.

James, on the other hand, was delighted to hear of them, and hurried to Lennox in his writing-room long before the animals could be expected to have been disembarked.

"They kept me signing papers this morning till I thought my wrist would break," he grumbled. "And each dealing with more trivial stuff than the last. Some one is to be commissioned to go round every household in the realm, Esmé, and demand a sight of Bible and Prayer Book of the Protestant Kirk, clear marked with the owner's name. As if I cared that they should all have Bibles. The Kirk does nothing but seek for new ways of spending the money in the Treasury, while I can scarcely have new saddles for my horses without an outcry. Oh, Esmé, that reminds me. Do you think the horses that are coming from the Duke of Guise will be here soon?"

Lennox slid a sheaf of papers together and pushed them into a drawer. "We shall have word from Leith as soon as they land, you know."

"Shall we? Perhaps the messenger will be delayed," said James. "I would not put it past the Kirk. The ministers do not wish me to accept them."

"Why not?" asked the Duke of Lennox, arching his eyebrows in that typical gesture of disdainful surprise which the representatives of the Kirk always found specially hard to endure.

"It is not the will of God, according to Master Durie, minister of Edinburgh," said James crossly, "that I should ride on Popish horses."

"Indeed?" said Lennox, choosing himself a quill from the tray in front of him and beginning to cut it with care. "I wish that I were as sure of the wishes of the Almighty as Master Durie and the rest think themselves."

"You mean," said James, with returning hope, "that they may perhaps be wrong, in the matter of the horses?"

"In that as in other things," said Lennox. "Why not?"

"Indeed, why not?" said James delightedly. He swung himself from the arm of his friend's chair and caught him by the arm. "Let us at least go down to the stables and see what arrangements have been made for the comfort of the Duke's horses—perhaps they have arrived already and nothing done. Come, come. . . ."

Lennox laughed helplessly. "Oh, Jamie, Jamie, you pile responsibilities upon me and not a minute with which to attend to them. These papers are twice as immediate and four times as important as the Duke's nags, at present tossing on a fishy-smelling packet on the Narrow Seas. Take Arran to the stables with you if you must go."

"I would sooner take you," gloomed James.

"Then you must wait. I have a man ready to post off with these papers the instant they are sealed," said Lennox.

"What papers?" wondered James idly. The one flaw in his happiness these days was that Esmé was so much occupied with all this sad stuff; sometimes with the very door of his writing-room locked against all comers.

"Oh—papers: dull documents about this and that," said Lennox lightly. He reached for his seal and a stick of wax. "They would not interest you. But you will find a volume of sonnets new arrived from Paris on the window-seat."

James strolled across the room and picked up the beautiful little book, bound in scarlet leather cunningly scrolled with gold leaf. He stood, head down, elbow on knee and one foot on the sill, absorbed in the finely printed lines with their cunningly turned phrases. Yes, these men had the trick of it; their sonnets were like the perfectly shaped water drops that hung from leaf-tips after rain, the world mirrored, remote and tiny, in their depths.

At his table Lennox worked hurriedly. There was so much to be done. Catholic troops must be held in readiness: he must know how many men he could look for from each of the Catholic lords in the North. The Spanish Ambassador must be reassured; the Guises awaited his report; the Queen of Scotland fretted in her prison for news of his progress. He knew that time was short.

But he did not realise just how short it was. In July the Kirk, abandoning all disguise, presented a petition to the King, denouncing his friendship with "bloody murderers and persecutors," and Arran, attempting to browbeat the assembled ministers into caution by demanding who dared subscribe these treasonable articles, was met with open rebellion, and a united front.

"We dare and will subscribe them," cried Andrew Melville, as he snatched up a pen. "And will render our lives in the cause."

Arran glared and shouted. He had not the standing in the country to outface the whole of the people's precious Kirk. He knew it and tried to bluster. But his gestures and denunciations failed to produce the shadow of an impression on the flint-faced circle of ministers who watched him with steady contempt, and at last he flung out of the room, uneasily conscious of defeat. They must work more quickly, he warned Lennox, or the Kirk would

have the common people ready to mob them in the street. And he did not like the attitude of the Protestant lords.

Lennox did his best. He determined on a final push during August, when James would be out of the way on a hunting expedition in the north, and pled pressure of immediate affairs connected with the Duchy of Lennox when the boy begged him to take a holiday too.

"Away and enjoy yourself, Jamie, while I look after your affairs here. I cannot leave the city, indeed I cannot. I am waiting for messengers——"

"I shall not enjoy myself if you are not there, and you know it," said James. "For weeks and weeks I have seen nothing of you for papers. We have no gay times as we used——"

"Wait till these next weeks are over," promised Lennox, smiling up at him from a medley of curling documents, "and we shall have more gaiety than ever before. I promise you——"

"I do not want to go without you," said James. "What if—anything should happen to you while I am gone? I think I should die of it."

"Why, what could happen? Have I not a guard about me? What has given you these fancies?"

James shook his head. "I do not know. I feel heavy—here." He thumped himself on the chest.

Lennox laughed. "You need exercise, cousin. Away with you. And listen. If I can get this business set in train, I will follow and catch you up. Will that do?"

"Better than nothing, perhaps."

"Much better. Now go, my heart. The sooner gone, the sooner back, they say."

James twisted his arms round the Duke's neck and rubbed his head against the Duke's shoulder.

"Go away," groaned Lennox. "Your chin is as sharp as a sword-point in my neck."

Slowly James relaxed his hold. Lennox caught one of the boy's hands as they unclasped and gave it a pat to show there was no ill-feeling. Then he raised it to his lips. "Your Highness," he said, with a curiously formal little bow.

James laughed. "How grand you are. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Jamie."

James opened the door and went out. Then he poked his head back again. "You *will* still be there when I come back?"

Lennox screwed himself round in his chair to shake the fist which still held the dripping quill at him. "Lord, yes. What's the matter with you?"

"I do not know," said James. He closed the door, and went down the passage with slow, dragging steps. They never saw each other again.

It had so turned out that James was to be accompanied on that hunting-party by neither of his friends, for Arran had gone to Glasgow to settle some dispute, and James was followed by such lords as Mar and Glamis, and offered hospitality on his way home from the Forest of Athole, at Huntingtower, the Perthshire Castle of the Earl of Gowrie. They arrived late, and James, tired out, slept heavily, happy at the prospect of seeing Lennox again the next day. In the morning he came downstairs to set out again with his huntsmen, and was confronted by the solemn-faced assembly of the chief Protestant lords. The Earl of Gowrie asked his Highness to be good enough to precede him into the great chamber, where certain documents awaited his attention.

"Documents?" said James crossly. "I had hoped to leave such things behind me in Edinburgh."

"If your Highness will be seated, the matter will not take long," said the Earl of Gowrie.

James sat nervously in the chair drawn up for him.

Already he knew that something was wrong, and glanced eagerly from face to face in search of friends. The Earl of Gowrie cleared his throat and began to read from a scroll. James listened, first with surprise and then with growing horror. His "humble and dutiful subjects," whom he saw before him, announced in unmistakable language that the authority of the Duke of Lennox and the Earl of Arran (so-called) was at an end. For the safety of their King's person, the true religion and the realm, they proposed to keep him in their careful guardianship until Lennox had been sent back to France and Arran dismissed from the Court.

"This is outrageous," James cried. "You cannot do this."

"Indeed, your Highness, we can and shall," answered the Earl of Gowrie. "Messengers are waiting to be despatched to the Duke of Lennox with instructions to leave the country."

James was on his feet at once, shouting. "He shall not go."

"If you have any reason to consider his safety, your Highness," said the Master of Glamis shrewdly, "you will not advise him to stay. If he is still at Court in two day's time he will be put to death in the public interest. You will have his death on your hands."

"You cannot—you cannot do this," cried James. "My lords, he is my friend. I beg you will not send him from me. There is no harm——"

"There is danger. To the State," said Ruthven curtly.

James swung round impetuously. "Since when have you been such a patriot, my lord?"

Ruthven accepted the gibe unmoved. "Since I knew Lennox to be in touch with the Catholics in France and Spain, in England, and even in Scotland itself. He is

planning to bring back the Queen your mother, and Popery with her——”

“It is not true,” flared James.

“You must allow us, who are grown, to be the judges of that. It is not a matter for children.”

“I am not a child,” said James with weary truth. Then, on a sudden, agonised change of mood he clutched at Gowrie’s sleeve. “But I am a king and—and—yet I—I beg you to listen to me——”

“We are listening,” said the Earl of Gowrie.

James made the supreme, sickening effort of a reserved young creature who forces himself, against all his instincts and only by sheer will-power, to display his deepest emotions before the cynical stare of his enemies. “I was—alone—till Lennox came—I had no friends—this man is dear to me. He was—you see—he was *kind*——”

Somewhere at the back of the silent group some one guffawed.

James seemed to shrink. He stood before them, silent, his face colourless to his compressed lips, his hands clenched at his sides.

“Your Highness,” interposed Ruthven crisply, “let us come to essentials. Will you sit down again? It is less—exhausting.”

Inertly James obeyed him.

“So. We have here two papers which we require you to sign. One is directed to the Council and will be shown to the Ambassadors of England and France, should they inquire into the position. It states that you remain in our care with your own good will and consent. . . .”

James roused himself. “That is a filthy lie. I will never sign it——”

“We will see. The other is to the Duke of Lennox, saying that it is by your wish and for his safety that he leaves the country immediately for France.”

James twisted in his chair, his hands before his face. "It is wicked. You are cruel. You cannot make me sign such lies. I will not send the Duke away. I will not, I will not. . . . Is there no one among you . . ." He dropped his hands from his tear-streaked face and stared in desperation round the ranks of harshly indifferent men. Glamis, Glencairn, Lindsay, Hume, he saw no hope in their stolid bearded faces, no hope in the glinting, diabolic amusement of a young man newly arrived from the Continent, whom he had heard called Bothwell, a boy only a few years older than himself, nephew as it happened, of his mother's lover, her godson, and his own cousin. At last he saw the Earl of Mar towering among them, sulky and shamefaced. "Jock, Jock, will you not make them let me go?"

The Earl of Mar shook his lowered head. The tips of his ears turned slowly scarlet and he did not look at James.

"You will be advised to sign, your Highness——" The Earl of Gowrie spoke smoothly, determined to keep his temper over this affair.

James swung round on him.

"I tell you I will not. Lennox and Arran will come in search of me. They will follow me here with an army. Oh, you will suffer for this, my lord."

"No doubt, your Highness. But meanwhile, unless you sign this paper, the Duke of Lennox will unfortunately not survive to rescue you. We have set our men about him. They have their instructions."

"It is not true!"

"Indeed, your Highness, it is as true as you sit there. But we have no wish to disturb you. We will retire. The papers, with everything needful, are on the table at your elbow. You will be left alone, free to think that unless this paper," he held it up between finger and thumb, "reaches Lennox to-morrow night, it will be too late to save him."



"I tell you I will not—I will break out of this place—I will tear the papers and throw them from the windows—I will cry for help . . . I . . . I . . . *will not sign.*"

"The ink is beside the tray of quills, your Highness," said the Earl of Gowrie, as he closed the door behind him. James, rushing to throw himself against its heavy panels, heard the great bar slide into place outside.

"Open . . . I command you to open . . . it is the King!" he shouted. There was no reply. He raised his fists and battered them against the solid oak which hardly shook under blows which made the blood start from his grazed knuckles. He ran to the window and flung the casement back. Far below lay the sweet, unconcerned summer landscape, mounded with the hay which had been cut in the narrow valley between the noisy river and the hills. He shouted . . . but the tiny figures of the men and women busy with the slow-moving beasts neither heard nor turned. He flung himself away from the casement and began to tramp up and down the room, without a glance at the documents held flat by paper-weights on the heavy table, though from the corners of his eyes he saw them continually. Gowrie had said that his men were waiting till to-morrow night before they killed Esmé. He was probably lying. Esmé said that he had a good guard. But did he know the credentials of every man in it? Of course not. The Earl of Gowrie might easily have planted some of his servants there. They would slip in as he wrote . . . so busily . . . it was easy to surprise him when he was writing, as he himself knew. He had done it many times. He could see him now, at the table across the window embrasure, his auburn head bent over his work . . . a scarlet-bound book of sonnets on the window-sill . . . a man stepping up behind him . . . Esmé's head turned in surprise . . . a knife drawn across his throat. . . .

"God . . . *God*," groaned James. He turned at the far wall and came pacing back, his thoughts off at a tangent. How far was it to Edinburgh from this place? He did not know. But it must be a day's journey or more. What if the man riding with the paper got lost, if his horse broke a leg, if he failed to reach Edinburgh in time . . . if that knife were drawn . . . ?

Up the room again, and back. Up and back, striking out with bruised hands at the walls, the table as he passed: there was no escape for him, and only this chance for Esmé. Back in France he would be safe, he might even come to Scotland again, and even if he did not, better to think of him alive, even never to be found again, somewhere in the world, than for Esmé, who so loved life, to lie dead, with that gash across his throat.

And yet, to send him away, to send him out of his life, that life which he had transfigured, was it not to turn that knife into his own heart? How would he live, when he had no longer that companionship in which he seemed to live doubly, reassured and comforted by laughter, stung by wit, elated by an understanding which chimed with his own as its very echo? He had held the friendship about him against the clod-like indifference of these Scottish lords like a warm cloak on a winter's night, yearned towards it like a fire which would thaw a numbed heart. To send his friend away would be to strip off the cloak, to leave the fire, to go out into the dark.

But to leave the paper unsigned was to rend the cloak itself, to quench the fire, to carry Esmé Stuart's death about him on his soul until he himself could die. A choice? He *had* no choice. James dropped down on the stool, drew the papers towards him, and blindly scrabbled in the tray for a quill to push into the ink.

It might have been an hour later, or five minutes, when the Earl of Gowrie unbarred the door. He came softly

across the room, proud and leisurely, like a satisfied cat.

"Well?" he said.

James did not raise his head from the arm crooked across the table. "I have signed," he said, in an expressionless voice.

"Your Highness has been wise." The Earl picked up the papers, glanced critically at the jagged signatures, and silted some sand across them. "Henderson," he ordered, "see that these papers are immediately delivered to the horseman who is waiting."

"Very good, my lord."

"What about the fellow Arran?" James heard some one say.

"I can deal with him," said Gowrie cheerfully. "He is no more than a tool, in my opinion. A gas-bag. I will have dinner sent up to you at once, your Highness."

James heard the door close and the bar fall into place, then, almost immediately afterwards, it seemed, came the stammer of hooves on the cobbles, far below. Listlessly he dragged himself up by the edge of the heavy table and went to stand by the open casement, arms outstretched to prop himself up by the stones of the window-frame. Far away down a horseman trotted out through the gateway, and broke into a gallop as he took the track which led south, over the foothills and out of sight.

Exhausted, drained of all sensation, his eyes harsh and dry for want of tears, James watched him go. Long after the small speck of man and beast had disappeared in the grape-bloom shadows of the pass he stood there still, stricken.

Sometimes a young tree will stand so, after frost, more piteous, in the frustration of its too early promise, than ever in the solitude of winter, through which fresh promise sleeps.

*Part Three*

THE LOVER

*"As falcons are by nature fair of flight,  
Of kind as sparrow-hawks excel in speed,  
As martens have in springing greatest might,  
As goshawks are of nature given to greed . . .  
Even so all women are of nature vain,  
And cannot keep no secret unrevealed,  
And whereas once they do conceive disdain,  
They are unable to be reconciled."*

JAMES VI., *Lusus Regius*.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE WINTER OF JAMES'S captivity seemed even longer than usual to the poor, for whom any winter is long. Their peat-stacks dwindled in the aching cold of the darkest January men remembered for fifty years, and food prices rose far beyond the reach of the lower classes. There were ugly stories, too, of prosperous merchants who bought up stores of corn and held them till they might be released for sale at an outrageous profit. The ministers blazed the triumph of the Protestant cause in the defeat of Lennox and Arran from every pulpit in Edinburgh, but their enthusiasm could not lift the apathy of cold and hunger from their huddled congregations.

Round Stirling, even in March, the snow lay deep, and James sat in his old schoolroom at the summit of the tower, elbows spread out on the familiar, ink-daubed, knife-gouged table of many memories. The room was quiet, and the winter muffling subdued the usual undertone of noises on the cobbles of the streets outside the castle into an uncanny silence, broken in the dusk of the late afternoon by cheerful yells from groups of children snowballing each other on their way home from school.

James noticed the noise without interest, as he noticed everything round him, these days. He had been writing, and the paper in front of him was covered with a painful network of scribblings and alterations, lines and phrases scored out with violent drives of his quill, to be re-written again and again in an attempt to get nearer to the core of his thought. Only a few lines at last stood clear out of the tortuous process of evolution, wrung as

it seemed from the inner bitterness where the memory of his happiness had turned parasitical and eaten away the flower of his youth. James was only seventeen, but from the depth and secrecy of his experience a character was emerging which was no longer young. It was as if a stream which had run gaily between the rocks of its bed in the sunshine had turned to slide darkly underground.

“Since thought is free, think what thou wilt,  
O troubled heart, to ease thy pain.  
Thought unrevealed can do no ill  
But words passed out come not again. . . .”

The remaining daylight turned the writing to a blur. James dropped the quill listlessly into its tray, and sat there waiting, without the slightest expression on his face, for the moment when it would please his masters to have lights brought to his room.

Only the snow-glare lit the ceiling now: the rest of the room was so deeply shadowed that the bulks of chair, table and benches were drowned and lost. The paper under James's hands alone survived the annihilation of all form and colour in the inertia of dusk. But dusk had deepened almost into darkness before James stirred, and then it was only to turn his head with faint curiosity towards the sound of some one singing in the corridor outside. The servants in the Castle did not habitually sing about their work. Nor did the lords, his captors. The ironic reverence they showed him made it unlikely that they would come so unceremoniously into his presence. On the other hand, one of them might be drunk. And a drunkard might perhaps be outwitted, escaped from. . . .

But the instinctive hope was dashed by the memory

which followed it. Two days ago they had brought him the news that Esmé Stuart, sometime Duke of Lennox and Lord High Chamberlain of Scotland, was dead, far off in France. As it had once seemed impossible that Esmé could die so now it seemed impossible that he himself could live on. Escape meant nothing, led nowhere. It was too late to think of escape. Only revenge remained. But he was too tired to think of that. The emotions of the last two days, since the news came, seemed almost to have shaken his soul from his body. He was staring straight in front of him as the latch rattled and the door swung open, unfolding a fan of candlelight from the corridor outside.

Some one stood in the doorway, a pile of garments, blackly seen in outline, across one arm, peering and singing, then broke off to add in a pleasant, cheerful voice, "curse those fellows. Why they cannot gather up the strength to carry a taper round this rabbit warren at nightfall——" He stumbled across the room towards the fireplace and kicked at the sullen peats in search of a spark with which he might kindle a light.

At the table James did not move or speak, but Walter swung round suddenly, stared about him in something like panic, and let his bundle of clothes slide to the floor as his hand went to his belt.

"Is some one there?" he demanded.

"Yes," said James indifferently.

"Then—who—what——?"

"A bogle," said James in the same flat voice, "come to carry you off to hell."

"You are a man, not a bogle," Walter laughed. "And when I can see more than an inch in front of me I will show you how I deal with such jokers."

He plunged down on the hearth, blowing at the peat, conjuring up first smoke, then a fine glow, which broke



into flame as he fed it with sticks from the basket. At last he reached a candle down from its sconce and used it to light some of the others which were set in pairs round the room, on iron brackets which had been stabbed into the mortar between the great stones of the wall. The room now lacked its hangings; only the clumsy tenter-hooks projected to show where the tapestry should have been suspended from its rings.

"And now," said Walter, as he turned, blinking, from the wall, "what do you know of hell, my bogle?"

"Everything," said James.

Walter held the remaining candle high and stared. He saw a slight youth hunched on a stool on the far side of the board. His chin was propped on his hands, and he looked cynically up at Walter from enormous, dark-shadowed blue eyes. He had pushed his hair untidily behind his ears, his face was colourless, and his thin mouth twisted into an ironic smile which was more of a nervous twitch.

"You will set light to your clothes," said James, as Walter continued to gape, his candle held askew.

Mechanically Walter righted it, and restored it to its place on the wall. James was cruelly changed since the day of his ride through Edinburgh, but Walter knew him, and his astonishment at finding the King of Scotland sitting in an unlit room warmed only by a dying fire, was overcome by indignation at such a state of affairs. It might be the first time in his life that he had been within speaking distance of a king, but Walter fancied he knew misery when it confronted him. Had he himself not sat alone in the deserted office of his uncle's warehouse in Antwerp, lonely and despairing over a refractory page of addition, many a time, convinced that the world was a wilderness because he himself was alone in it?

"Just wait till I get the fire going," said Walter practi-

cally, squatting down again, and selecting logs which would take flame from the smaller sticks. "Come over beside it. You must be perished, sitting there."

"I—suppose I am," said James. He rose stiffly and walked round the table, idly watching Walter as he piled the fire with the driest of the logs in the big basket. He lounged across the room to the hearth, and stood with one elbow on the rough stone overmantel, letting the comfortable warmth creep up his limbs again like life itself. Walter paid no attention to him. His interest seemed to be concentrated on the progress of the fire, and he shielded his screwed-up eyes with one hand while he checked the leaping flames with fresh fuel.

"There, that's better now, isn't it?" he said at last. "It's enough to give any one the creeps sitting up here alone. They told me this floor was not to be used, and I came up with a lot of household stuff there wasn't room for down below and might as well be out of the way." He indicated the tumbled heap of velvets and brocades on the floor behind him.

"Where have you come from?" James asked, not so much because he was interested as because Walter's rough young voice was pleasanter than the drip and slither of snow thawing from the eaves under the soft drizzle carried on the south-west wind.

"Up from the Gardrobe below stairs," said Walter. "And cramped we are, too, here in Stirling, though in Holyrood it's another matter."

"You'd sooner be in Holyrood?"

"I would that. What for would any one sit here in Stirling, now, when they might be there, with Edinburgh in front of them instead of this windy plain?"

"I don't know," said James. "I don't much care where I go, these days."

"Eh, but you should go to Edinburgh," said Walter

cheerfully. He stooped to blow on a smouldering log, his cheeks distended and fiery like one of the cherubs of the winds on James's terrestrial globe which stood in a dim corner. Walter had no previous experience of royalty. The Garderobe was rather like his father's booth, and his master kept him too busy to have any time to spare to go gaping at what Court ceremonial there was. So James, seen close at hand, had ceased to be the King, and become merely a lonely boy, much younger than himself and kept idling in this dismal castle away from all his friends. No wonder he was sad. But when he had been sad himself, in the Antwerp days, his uncle had not been sympathetic. He had declared that Walter needed rousing, and set him briskly about his work. So now Walter did his best to rouse James. "Aye, Edinburgh's the place," he said. "It's fine and noisy. Not like this weary old ruckle of stones away up among the birds of the air where there's nothing to hear but the wind going round the walls as if it wanted to pull them down."

"It does sound like that," James agreed.

"Aye, and there's nothing else to listen to," said Walter triumphantly. "Now in Edinburgh there's plenty. The folk are all round ye from morning till night, selling this and that, argying and fechting outside your door, driving kye or pigs or sheep or green stuff to the markets. Oh, it's a fine busy sight, with the hen-wives bringing fowls up the street to the Mercat Cross in baskets across an old pony's back, all screeching and crowing till the very minute the wifie wrings their necks. Aye, and she screeches above them, too, when the bairns let the lid off her baskets and her hens set off for home with half the idle rubbish of the High Street after them and such language out of the hen-wife as you never heard. And all the people stop and laugh, and the pigs and cows turn and set off as well, and coup the stalls and set the

fishwives' stuff down into the mud with all the folk that's after a bargain laying hand of whatever they can reach—"

James nodded with the ghost of a smile. "Go on," he said.

Walter talked on willingly enough. He described his father's business, his own apprenticeship in Antwerp, the persecution of the Protestants by Alva's soldiers, his thankfulness at getting home. James did not listen to it all, but he gained a general impression of a very different life from his own, made up of busy, uneventful routine, dark, early risings to the sound of the warning drum, bone-weary sleep at night, safely surrounded by the households of all the other sleeping citizens. And on the Sabbath, the procession of decently-dressed families to the kirk at sermon-time, the quiet, unusually scoured streets, the Bible and the Catechism at home in the evening, all were part of the precious uneventful security which James had never glimpsed, though his own name, even while he was kept in custody by these lords, stood for security to his people.

"I should like to see Edinburgh again," he said. Edinburgh had been kind to him. He and Esmé had been happy there.

"And what's to hinder you?" said Walter briskly.

James lifted his hands and let them fall again as if they were bound together.

Walter spoke impatiently. "Heaven save us, man, who's to help you if you don't help yourself? Think shame of it, sitting there without fire or light and a face like something half dead——"

"The Duke of Lennox is dead," said James in a flat voice. "So now it is of no consequence what I do——"

"And how's it going to help the Duke for you to sit there so dowie and mim?" said Walter. "Lord, *I* would be up and setting off to make some of them sorry——"

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth . . ." murmured James. "Is that what the Kirk says?"

"I'm not caring what the Kirk says," said Walter roundly, "but if it were me I'd not sit there with my head in my hands."

"What would you do?" asked James indifferently.

"Do? I'd get out of here first. And then I'd learn them that kept me——"

"Would you?" said James. "Yes, perhaps. But I'm so tired."

"Tired?" said Walter with a contemptuous snort. "My father says that's no word for a man."

"And still less for a King," agreed James with a wry smile. "Why, what is it now?" For Walter, who had harangued him so fiercely, had begun to fidget and flush.

"I—had forgotten the King," mumbled Walter. "I spoke to a man like myself."

James laughed. "You would take it back, would you? Does a merchant need more spirit than the King of Scotland?"

"He does not," said Walter stoutly. "And I would not take back a word of it. If you are to rule Scotland——"

"They say I rule Scotland now," said James ironically. "My name must be on their parchments. James R, it has magic properties. When I set my signature to them, mere words become law——"

"Aye, but they are other men's words," said Walter quickly. "If you are to rule Scotland—sir—the words must be your own."

"Yes," said James. "That is true. And once I have made myself master over the great lords I shall rule Scotland. Well——"

Walter shook his head.

"Why not?"

"You must be master of the Kirk and all."

"The Kirk . . ." repeated James. "So the Kirk is a greater power than the King?"

"Aye, it is so."

"We shall see," murmured James. "You seem to have ideas; what's your name?"

"Walter Haliburton."

"Your father is a merchant?"

"Merchant and burgess of Edinburgh, sir."

"You can read and write?"

"Scots, French and Flemish."

"Good. You—you would help me?"

"How?" demanded Walter warily.

"By bearing certain letters for me out of this place in secret."

"Aye, I could."

"I wonder . . ." said James. A wave of his previous inertia returned, threatened to overwhelm his newly-roused resolution, so that his character swung, as it was still apt to do in that year of its harsh moulding, between secret strength and all too evident weakness. Later the weakness was to remain, superficial only, as a mask for the increasing purpose within. But now, his purpose was still unsure, his power unproved; and his ability to use his own weakness and buffoonery in order to turn other men's strength against themselves was only emerging slowly from his helplessness, as the wings of some predatory insect struggle feebly from their outworn sheath. "Well, I will think of it. Come here to-morrow at this time and I may have some commissions for you."

"I will, sir." Walter gathered up his pile of tumbled velvets and went towards the door.

"On the other hand," said James, over his shoulder, "I may decide to do nothing at all, to let things go, to sit here, as you said, with my head in my hands. . . ."

"Not you," said Walter cheerfully.

"How can you tell what I will do," said James peevishly, "when I do not know myself?"

Walter closed the door behind him without attempting to find a reply, since he did, in fact, fully expect that James would relapse into that state of indifference in which he had found him. So it was with some surprise that he went up to the old schoolroom in the tower the following afternoon and found James adding his signature to a vehemently scrawled letter. The air was hot and sweet with the smell of wax, and a pile of untidily sealed and folded notes lay on the board beside him. Walter could read the names of the most important lords of the faction opposed to the Ruthvens: Argyle, Huntly, Montrose, Melville. . . . Many of them, he saw, were Catholics, and he whistled silently as he wondered what the Kirk would have to say to this day's work, if the ministers ever found out his share in it.

"Put them in your pouch, for pity's sake," said James irritably. "And get them out of the place. Now I have set myself to this enterprise I will not be hindered."

"They shall go at once," said Walter.

And so the matter was set in train. James went secretly about his plans, receiving the English Ambassador and his assurances of Queen Elizabeth's affection with the same dispassionate languor with which he listened to the envoy from France. He did not let the Frenchman see how angry it made him to be addressed as "Majesty" only because his mother had given her permission for the Frenchman to use the title. But he noted it as one more proof that she grudged him his kingdom and his power. The thought was intolerable. What remained, in a world become at the death of his friend a mere echoing emptiness, but power, and power, and power? If he could not be happy, he would be great instead. He would

be King of Scotland, head of the Kirk, divine ruler by the grace of God, not over Scotland only, but of England besides, and of those new lands beyond the sunset that Esmé had spoken of. Esmé. . . .

He closed his lips on the pain of that memory and wrote meekly to his godmother of England, assuring her of his duty and patience, his gratitude to her and affection to the lords who guarded him. But he also set about planning his escape. He had become, since the project had been mooted, definitely eccentric in his manner to the lords, varying irrelevant meanderings with sudden bursts of vacant laughter. Fatuous as he seemed, however, it was just at this time that the English Ambassador grumbled that he had taken to keeping the key of the chest which contained his papers in a secret place, so that it was no longer possible to inspect the contents unofficially from time to time in the interests of English diplomacy.

But the Ruthven lords, accustomed to accepting authority only when it was imposed on them by force, confidently declared James to be harmless and probably weak-witted, because he seemed so idle and such a clown, with his new habit of making foolish little jokes and laughing at them himself when no one else did.

"There is no need for him to be so carefully watched," said the Master of Glamis contemptuously, as the lords filed out into the corridor after a farcical audience with him. "I am tired of this. Leave a few servants behind to serve him with food, and we can go about our business. I must go home and see to my affairs before my wife ruins them with her extravagance."

"There is no harm in the boy," growled Lord Lindsay. "He has neither the spirit nor the wit to outface us."

"I'm half inclined to let him go free," said the Earl of Gowrie. "He knows us for his masters, and we should



save both trouble and expense if we ruled him through the Council and let him find his own keep."

But others were doubtful. The country was still unsettled, there were many powerful people outside their faction, the Kirk had far too great an idea of its own importance, and the common people still had a sentimental fondness for the young King. Only while they held his person were they sure of being the most important party in Scotland.

But surely, if the boy were so harmless——

Harmless or not, what was the point of taking risks?

It was not a question of risk——

The disagreement was typical of the wrangles which were now becoming frequent. James, no longer lolling and giggling like the buffoon they were meant to think him, listened, tense and alert, at the crack of the door, to the discussion in the corridor outside. The dispute grumbled away down the stairs. The Ruthven Lords were no longer a united party, but a collection of exasperated individuals only held together by their common ambition to rule the country of which James was King. Sitting alone in his room, watching the tree-tops, far below, turn green with the reluctant northern spring, James smiled without mirth or pleasure, drawing his lips back slightly from his teeth as he arranged the details of his departure. The fruit trees blossomed in the wind-harried orchards, the blossom scattered and the fruit set.

Then, one day in June, shortly after his eighteenth birthday, James rode out to hunt. None of the lords were with him: the huntsmen had been carefully chosen. The party halted a few miles from Stirling, the hounds were sent home in charge of a stable-lad, and weapons distributed. Then James wheeled his horse about, dug in the spurs, and set off in a cloud of summer dust for

St. Andrews, where various lords of the opposite faction had been commanded to meet him.

It was a brave moment. As he galloped along the thread of track that meandered by the burnside, then set off to climb the shoulder of hill beyond, the colour was whipped back to James's forlorn young face. Behind him the hooves of his followers' horses sent the stones from the path spinning down the hillside: above him the peewits tumbled and cried. Mile after mile separated him from his gaolers: the sun sailed out into a sea of blue sky from behind a rampart of cloud. James tossed his cap madly towards it and laughed as it was caught in a thorn bush by its feather. As they checked their horses at the summit of the rise and began to amble more carefully down the stony track into the next valley James began to sing, loudly and belligerently, his tuneless voice as discordant as the peewits above him in the triumphant psalm.

“Ev’n as a bird  
Out of the fowler’s snare  
Escapes away,  
So is our soul set free.  
Broke are their nets. . . .”

The exultant melody was taken up by the younger huntsmen, who shouted it till the horses laid back their ears, but the sound died suddenly in James's throat as he remembered that Esmé would never again ride out to meet him. The elderly servant at the tail of the procession shook his head at them and grumbled at the folly of a leader who let his secret departure become public property by shouting and bawling it half across Scotland. With the noise they were making, the Earl of Gowrie and the rest could follow their trail like hounds on a breast-high

scent, and it would be back again to the cage for his Highness and tramping the rounds for a new job for all the young fools now roaring and singing psalms at his back.

But the alarm was not given till too late. James made the journey in safety and was received by the Provost of St. Andrews and various lords, among them the worried Sir James Melville, summoned from peaceful retirement on his Fife estate by one of James's imperious notes.

The whole project was distasteful to Sir James Melville, who, at fifty, had been effectively disillusioned by his experience at Court, and wished only to be left in peace to experiment with the crossing of various breeds of cattle according to theories of his own. Cattle, as he told his wife, were less kittle than princes, and on the whole, more likely to show gratitude for the trouble he took with them.

So it was with an exceedingly bad grace that he heaved himself on to his horse to ride to St. Andrews, and, once there, shook his head over the arrangements for James's accommodation. He was to be lodged, it seemed, in an old and derelict inn, with no defences whatever, and James in his eagerness had arrived in the town before the majority of the lords he had summoned could have reached the neighbourhood, since so many of them, like Huntly, were Catholic landowners from the north, with a couple of days' journey before them.

James greeted Melville with something of his earlier sweet candour. He had always liked the older man, in spite of his tendency to prosy admonition, because of his genuine loyalty, a quality which he had encountered so seldom in his harried youth.

"I might have known you would not fail us," said James. "Oh, I am glad to see you here. The others are

all late, they tell me, and only the Earls of March and Crawford are ready. It is a shame. If all my fine plans go wrong. . . .”

“They will not go wrong, your Majesty,” said Sir James, “if you will allow me to advise you.”

“I am tired of taking advice,” said James, sulky in his reaction from the morning’s glorious mood. “It is mostly another name for obeying orders.”

“Not in my case, I promise,” said Melville. “I am thinking of nothing but the safety of your enterprise.”

“Yes, and what then?” said James curtly.

Sir James Melville sighed. There was little gratitude to be expected from princes. He wished himself home again among his gentle cattle with their sweet breath and mildly flapping ears, who went where they were told and did not argue for the sake of asserting themselves.

“I have spoken to the Provost,” he explained, “and asked him what forces he could command within the town. He told me very few, and not to be trusted. He could promise nothing regarding the defence of this place——” he looked with the expert, disparaging eye of a soldier round the inn parlour. “It lies open to attack from every side. It is old, rat-riddled and rotten. Such men as I have could not defend it for an hour. Your Majesty must move to the Castle.”

“I will *not* move to the Castle,” said James instantly. He was tired and disappointed and must get rid of his irritation by contradicting some one. “I am perfectly safe here.”

“Very well,” said Sir James. “It shall be just as you wish. But if your Majesty will come to the window. . . .”

James crossed the parlour with a gesture of impatience and looked along the knight’s pointing arm. It was near sunset, and the inn was commandingly set where several highroads joined. Far along the way from the west

moved flickering points of light as the sun caught spear-heads, and body-armour, and steel caps.

"Why, here come the lords I summoned," said James in delight.

"On the contrary," said Melville gloomily. "They are the Earl of Gowrie's party, and others with them. *Your* lords are to ride unarmed."

"I see . . ." said James. And then: "You are sure of this?"

"I made it my business to find out," said Sir James.

James stood for a couple of minutes, watching the approach of the soldiers. Then he swung round. "I will come to the Castle," he said.

Sir James Melville hustled him out of the inn and round by unfrequented ways to the Castle on its cliff before he could again change his mind, another royal habit with which he was exceedingly well acquainted. But James did not change his mind. He set too much store by the success of his coup to endanger it by displays of temperament. All went well. The Catholics and other anti-Ruthven lords arrived, the Ruthven Lords found themselves outnumbered, and the Earl of Gowrie came humbly to ask James's forgiveness for his detention, making him laugh bitterly by describing it as a "purely accidental fault."

But he was in a mood to promise forgiveness. It suited his immediate plans, and he knew that for the present he was not sure enough of his position to do anything else. Later, he would see. Meanwhile there was to be gracious oblivion for anything unconstitutional done during his minority; he undertook to satisfy the Kirk, to show himself impartially well-disposed to all classes and factions. "I mean to be a universal king," said James, with a sweeping, braggart gesture. Bygones, he promised, should be bygones.

But even so he did not lose many months before sending for young Ludovic, Esmé Stuart's son, out of France. Sir James Melville, twisting the ends of his whitening moustache, opined that his Majesty intended other people to do the forgetting, while he retained his memory himself.

James received Esmé Stuart's son at the audience which he held at Stirling, after the hunt. Something morbid and self-tormenting in his character made him arrange the circumstances as nearly as might be to match that earlier audience with the boy's father, when he himself was little older than Esmé's son. He had been making plans for the boy's reception ever since he had sent the invitation, which was also a summons, over to his home in France. Ludovic's mother might perhaps not wish to part with her son, Sir James Melville had hinted, with his usual flair for disagreeable possibilities. Then she must put her wishes behind her back. Was it not to the boy's advantage that he should come to the Scottish Court and take his place as something like its heir presumptive? Was the woman to venture to stand in the way of her child's future? What had a mother to do with the education of her son? He should be in the company of men: at women's skirts boys learned only to be milksops. The Comtesse D'Aubigny may have wept. James did not know or care. But now the boy had come, had been brought to Stirling, waited outside as his father had waited for the moment of audience. He himself sat on the same chair, backed with the same cloth of state, his feet firmly planted now on the velvet cushion which he had hardly been able to reach five years before. He had arranged that the boy should be the last to be presented, and all through the audience he waited, the new mask of good-tempered inanity on his face, for the moment when they would bring him back something of his lost past in Esmé's son.

Twelve . . . seven . . . four . . . two more wretched Highland chiefs remained, with their slow movements, incomprehensible compliments and touchy dignity. At last they were gone. The halberds grounded and clashed: Ludovic was coming. James kept his eyes on the carpet in front of him: he would not look up till he could see the boy there, in front of them, as he had seen his father. He had invited Esmé's son to Scotland as a Stuart, to take up his father's estates: if he had other reasons, his inquisitive courtiers must not guess them. He wondered if the new arrival excited their interest. Yes, they were craning and whispering, as usual. His cousin, young Francis Bothwell, his mother's godson, was chattering like an indignant ape: he fancied himself for the Succession, too, they said. Well, he could whistle for his chances, once Esmé's son arrived. There was Johnny Mar, looking troubled and sulky, beside the Earl of Gowrie. Johnny had got into bad company, these days. It was a pity. James did not wish him to share in what was coming to the Earl of Gowrie, who stupidly thought himself safe, because of the royal pardon.

"Your Majesty, I beg the honour of presenting. . . ."

James raised his head. At the foot of the steps stood a sturdy, stockish child of ten, round-faced, black-eyed, as expressionless and wholesome as a boiled pudding just out of its cloth. Of his father's beauty, his ardent vitality, his proud sweetness, there was not a trace. If Esmé's enchanting ghost walked anywhere, thought James, savage with disappointment, it could hardly find a congenial lodging in the dumpy body of his son.

With the eyes of the whole Court upon him James made conventional gestures of welcome, offered his hand, assured the self-possessed child of his royal protection, his interest and his affectionate memories of his father, whose duchy he wished to bestow on Ludovic.

Still kneeling, the boy looked at him phlegmatically. "I - shall - in - all - things - show - my - eternal - gratitude - to - your - Majesty," he said, all in one breath and without the slightest expression.

James laughed. He might as well enjoy the joke which fate had arranged for his benefit. "And are you a good horseman yet?" he asked.

Ludovic took a deep breath. "Grieved-as-I-am-to-leave-my-native-land-yet-I-shall-always-look-on——"

"No, no," said an anxious voice at his elbow. "My education is as yet——"

Ludovic frowned, and shook his head like a blundering puppy which has stubbed its nose on an unexpected obstacle. Then he set off doggedly on the more appropriate reply. "My - education, - your - Majesty, - is - as - yet - incomplete, but - I - shall - do - my - utmost - to - attain - skill - in - all - branches - suited - to - my - position - and - your - gracious - patronage."

"That must have been a hard one to get by heart," said James, intent only on masking with apparent amusement the abysmal depths of his disappointment.

Ludovic cocked an inquiring eye at the tall courtier who had escorted him into the Presence in case James's remark called for the production of another item from his carefully-conned repertoire. But Patrick, Master of Gray, shook his head, and James turned to him with a certain interest.

"Who taught the boy these answers?"

"I did, your Majesty."

"He speaks no English, I take it?"

"Some dozen phrases besides those you have heard, your Majesty."

"You have brought him well prepared. And how did you ensure the right answers?"

Patrick, Master of Gray, possessed an exceedingly



innocent smile, in remarkable contrast to the complexity of his personality. This, in addition to his outrageous beauty—he was sometimes called the handsomest man in Europe—was his chief stock-in-trade as a successful adventurer. He used it now. “Unfortunately, we did not ensure it, as your Majesty observed. But there was a certain code, which involved various pinches and movements of the feet, with here a cough and there a hand raised as if to rub an itching ear——” He raised his own hand in demonstration as he spoke, and the efficient Ludovic, who had understood nothing for the last few minutes, observed his cue.

“The - deep - affection - I - have - continually - felt - towards - that - great - nation - of - which - your - Majesty - is - King——”

James, and the whole Court with him, roared with delighted laughter through which Ludovic’s lips could be seen to move as he finished his phrase. He was a good-natured child, and grinned at the success of the gibberish which he had spent so many weary hours in getting by heart.

“I congratulate you on your pupil,” said James as soon as he could hear himself speak. “And as for you, sir, we must have you continue at Court. Such diplomacy must not be lost to Scotland. You have great gifts,” said James.

The Master of Gray bowed deeply. “Such as they are,” he said silkily, “I lay them at your Majesty’s feet..”

So Ludovic, the new Duke of Lennox, was installed in Scotland, which was of no particular importance to any destiny except his own. But the arrival of the Master of Gray was ominous, for he was to play a part in the death of a queen.

James, cheated of his hopes of seeing the dead past rise, set himself to look to the future. He gave Gray a position

at Court, partly for his charm, which he had seen, and partly for his unscrupulousness, which he had guessed. He also brought back Arran, in spite of the protests of Sir James Melville, who was disinterested enough to obtain an audience and attempt interference, while most of the territorial lords merely grumbled and glared.

"Well, well, Sir James, you have come to scold me again. I know that look on your face."

Sir James Melville shook his head. "If I considered my own interests," he said gloomily, "I would hold my tongue like wiser men, who would watch you destroy yourself."

"I do not propose to destroy myself," said James. "Only to bring back the Earl of Arran to protect me."

"Since the conduct of Arran was the chief cause of the raid which made your Majesty prisoner for a twelve-month, I cannot see that his protection is likely to be of value," said Melville dryly.

"I have not forgotten that, Sir James. And for that reason the Earl of Arran will enjoy dealing with those lords."

"Whom your Majesty has already been pleased to pardon," Sir James protested. "Surely you would not go back on your royal——"

"I have a multitude of affairs to attend to," said James. "I see no reason why a king should have no right to the pleasures of scholarship and leisure. I have had part of my library at Stirling brought to Holyrood, I am in the middle of preparing a volume of verse for the press. I need some one to manage my affairs——"

"Then make a choice from amongst your ancient nobility," cried Melville, "whose fathers have served yours, whose names are part of our Scottish history, March, Argyle, Montrose, Crawford. . . ."

"I will not have these dry old sticks," shouted James.

"This jumped-up commoner, the Earl of Arran——"

"I will hear no more, Sir James!"

Sir James Melville put his hands behind his back, alarmed by an almost irresistible desire to box the ears of the obstinate young man before him. But James had not finished. "One other thing, Sir James——" He grinned suddenly, like a wicked, clever child, who knows how to disarm its exasperated elders. "And you must not be so angry with me."

"Indeed, your Majesty, I did not intend . . ." mumbled Sir James, who suffered at Court from an inability to lie as convincingly as his fellows.

"You did not intend me to know it. Quite so," said James. "But there it is." He held out his hand in an impulsive gesture. "I shall never forget, Sir James, that under God you were the instrument which gained me my liberty."

"Your Majesty does me too much honour," said Sir James stiffly.

"Oh, Sir James, not so much of your Majesty here and your Majesty there. Be human, man. Give me your advice. Listen. I want you to do something."

"I had—er—supposed as much," said Sir James Melville.

"I'll swear you had, you old fox," grinned James. "Heaven save me from these upright men. There is no getting round them. But the thing is this. I was helped, in my captivity, by a young member of my Household, who seems the sort of man I might do well to have about me. He is as honest as yourself."

"Indeed," said Sir James, unblinded. "And what is his estate, this rare creature, an honest man at Court?"

"He is employed in the Garderobe," said James. "And

I thought of making him a Gentleman of the Chamber for his services."

"H'm," said Sir James. "The Garderobe is an odd place for a gentleman's son to serve in. Still, many men these days prefer their sons to begin at the foot of the ladder. Is his family noble or gentle?"

"Neither one nor the other," James admitted. "He is the son of a merchant—in a large way of business, naturally—and a burghess of Edinburgh."

Sir James Melville looked scandalised. "Tch, tch, where in the world do you pick up these new notions?" he said severely. "First you must have a commoner to rule the country while you write verses, and then you would make a craftsman's son one of the sworn company of the Chamber. I have no patience with these fantastic ideas. You will soon say that you are not king over us by the divine right of God."

"That, never," said James. "But if my counsellors and gentlemen are able, why should I care what position their forefathers held, since they are dead and of no further consequence? This man is the son of a merchant, too, not of a craftsman. His father is likely to be chosen Provost of Edinburgh, one of these days, and that is a position of great trust. I tell you this, Sir James, these men of ancient lineage think more of their grandeur than of my divine right to authority over them as an anointed King. Because of my bare eighteen years, they think their three or four centuries of rascally ancestors make them of too much consequence to pick up the napkins I drop, but must send for their servants to save them the trouble. I ask you, what good is that to me?"

"Perhaps not much," Sir James Melville admitted. "Though I cannot call to mind any occasion on which I myself showed such beastly and aggressive pride, and my family is as ancient as any. Yet, sir, the ancient rule

judge the ambassadors of a King and Council greater than yours, and far above you. I mean the Lord of Hosts." He raised his hand above his head in a fine gesture, and the clouds which had been flying before the face of the sun on an east wind all day elected that moment to shred away from it so that the leader of the Kirk stood in the dim chamber shining like a saint.

"We do not dispute the authority of that Court, Master Melville," James interrupted, for they had been led by Arran's violence on to dangerous ground, and he must guide them hurriedly off it. "But what warrant have we that you, the ministers, in your arrogance, do not presume too boldly in the interpretation of its decrees?"

"What warrant indeed?" broke in Arran. "That's it. Produce it if you can."

With a swift movement Andrew Melville whipped out something and brought it down with a crash on the board in front of Arran. "There is my warrant, which not even you, my lord, will deny."

They looked at the little, worn Bible in silence. Undoubtedly the histrionic genius of the Scottish Kirk had scored an important point. Nor did the series of witnesses which followed succeed in shaking his position, though the Council contrived to condemn him for the boldness of his defence, and ordered him to be imprisoned for contempt in Edinburgh Castle. He escaped, however, and wisely took himself into England to wait till the immediate hue and cry had died down.

During his absence Arran was busy. He passed what the ministers called the Black Acts, which declared the supremacy of the King in spiritual as well as civil matters. Refusal to submit to it became treasonable, and the Kirk was deprived of the rights of free speech, free assembly and independent legislation. Bishops were to be intro-

duced again, and Archbishop Adamson, that sycophantic fox, as the Protestants called him, suggested that Arran should make it necessary for the ministers to make submission to the bishops also, or lose their livings instead.

This was too much. All over the country ministers sturdily refused to do anything of the sort. Arran threatened them: they followed Andrew Melville into England. There were riots in Edinburgh, and the windows of the Archbishop's palace were broken in St. Andrews. In Glasgow, that stronghold of Protestantism, the professors of the university were imprisoned for their support of the Kirk, the students disbanded and the gates closed. Even the wives of the banished ministers were ejected from their manses, and it seemed to the people like vengeance from heaven on the Earl of Arran when heavy rains destroyed the harvest and plague broke out up and down the country.

James, watching impatiently, saw that Arran had indeed over-reached himself, and that it would be impossible to enforce the appointment of bishops while the ministers were likely to become the centre of a popular revolt. Better let the matter slide than identify himself with any one as detested as Arran had become. It was a bitter disappointment. The Kirk still stood between him and the supreme power he wanted, and wanted at once. But better to wait, much as he hated waiting, than risk a greater loss. James, who was not in the habit of forgetting an experience, disciplined himself into the exasperated patience he had learned during the year of the Ruthven raid. At least Gowrie was dead. Arran had achieved that much. For the rest . . . there was plenty of time.

And now another problem loomed up to distract his attention. His mother, half forgotten, had been impris-

oned in England for nearly eighteen years, a storm centre for every discontented creature in his godmother's kingdom, a standing invitation to Philip of Spain. James had always done his best to avoid thinking of his mother. She had been, long ago, part of his nightmares, later some one who might be a murderess, and at last a lovely young woman inside the locket which Esmé wore. Esmé had been fond of her, and James had been jealous.

Esmé had gone. But jealousy remained, growing stronger, feeding on the bitterness of his loss, tangling itself up with the knowledge that she was living on in England while Esmé was dead. She was a prisoner but she laid claim to that kingdom which he already considered his. He could hate her for that, hate her and wish her dead.

Still . . . she was his mother. He must at least try to do something, for very decency's sake, and to prevent her from becoming an exceedingly inconvenient, popular martyr at a time when he needed all the popularity he could get for himself. It was at this point that James remembered that the enchanting Patrick, Master of Gray, still awaited his trial as a diplomat, and Patrick was accordingly bundled off to England to see what could be done to enchant Elizabeth.

That was in 1584, and James saw his handsome young ambassador off with high hopes. But Gray found it convenient to turn his coat; he betrayed Mary to Elizabeth, informed against the Earl of Arran, and arranged for the return of the Protestant lords from exile to bring about Arran's downfall and his own promotion instead.

The lords, once in Scotland, acted quickly.

James was surrounded by their forces in Stirling, and informed by Gray as their courteous but determined spokesman that they demanded pardon for themselves

and exile for Arran. James shrugged and listened without protest. He had not expected Arran to last long, but he had been useful while he lasted. As for Gray: "it is some time since I said you had the makings of a diplomat," James added calmly.

"Indeed," said Gray, with his engaging smile, "it was your Majesty who first put the idea into my head."

"Then see what you can do with this country's affairs," said James morosely. "They are getting noisy again. Am I *never* to have peace, Patrick?"

"You shall have it now, I promise. But first I have a petition from the lords out of England," said the Master of Gray. "They have asked me to lay humbly before your Majesty this statement of their case——"

But James waved Gray's closely-written parchment discontentedly away. "All these words, my good Patrick, no, take them out of my sight. We have no need of words: weapons have spoken loudly enough, and I want my dinner. These fellows have been flashing their steel in my eyes since daybreak, and what with Arran roaring into one ear and you wheedling down the other I am as deaf as one of the Castle gunners. Take them away now, you and your papers, take them away."

"By all means," smiled the Master. "And I will send word to the ushers that dinner is to be set on the board at once. Lindsay has brought a flagon of wine home with him on which he awaits your verdict. And the Earl of Mar has a fine edition of the English poet, Spenser, for you. It seems they are still talking of the *Faerie Queene*."

"They must be talking loud enough to deave each other for Jock to hear of it," said James. "Patrick, this does not seem to be turning out so badly, does it?" He had introduced a wistful note into his voice. "Perhaps things will go better now that this has been arranged.



These men must have thought kindly of me, away in England, to come home with their gifts, though I could have done without the swords and the shouting——”

“They were to frighten that fellow Arran,” said the Master of Gray.

James chuckled with that inanity which he could now assume at will. “These are men after my own heart. They rode north in under a week? That was impatience, if you like. And they found a warm enough welcome here, eh? And would have been warmer if Arran had had his way with things——” So he chattered on his way to dinner, loudly enough, as he hoped, to reassure his captors. He handled the new book, admired its binding as it lay beside his plate, tossed down a mug of the wine and slapped the Master of Gray heartily on the shoulder, laughing and grimacing like the buffoon they thought him. But behind that mask his thoughts scurried, prying and peering like little furtive beasts, as they scrutinised this new development. “Can I trust these men?” he was asking himself, as he lounged and laughed. “Is there fresh danger here?” Aloud he said, “Why, Patrick, we shall understand each other well enough.”

“I hope we shall,” said the Master of Gray.

So in due course the lords came to kiss the King’s hand, the grizzled Lord Lindsay, broad-shouldered, sulky Johnny Mar, and James’s melodramatic young cousin, Francis, Earl of Bothwell. Young Bothwell had not been driven into England with the rest of the Ruthven Lords two years before. His youth and inexperience had been urged on his behalf, and he had stayed at Court. So his immediate departure to join his friends once they were north of the Border had a certain air of ingratitude. James shook his head at him.

“What has persuaded you, Francis, to come in arms against me?”

Young Bothwell looked blank and offered no explanation.

"I wish you a more quiet spirit," said James.

Francis Hepburn bowed his head meekly enough. And James could not see the wild look of antagonism in his black eyes.

So the lords were home again, and Gray, not Arran, led the Council. Presently a project which had been in the air for some time materialised into a definite treaty of alliance between England and Scotland. Walsingham and Burleigh, Elizabeth's great ministers, were anxious to secure this before going to extremes with the captive Scottish Queen. It was to be a pact of mutual assistance, it was baited with vague promises about the Succession for James, it offered him a yearly pension on account, and it was signed on the first of April, 1586.

James was elated by it. At last, it seemed, national affairs were looking up. Elizabeth could not live for ever; Scotland was quiet. He could settle down to wait for his inheritance with an easy mind. He need weave no more webs to entangle his enemies, make no more decisions, face no more angry crowds of enraged ministers or noblemen. He could leave affairs of state to his Council, forget the noisy Kirk, slake his perpetual need of money with Elizabeth's pension, and give himself a long, long country holiday with his dogs, his horses and his books.

So the summer of 1586 was a happy one. James spent as little time as possible at Court, and was at one hunting lodge or another for the most of it. He became as brown as his huntsmen, and with so much open air and exercise lost most of his quivering, nervous intensity. It was a good life for a king: early out, these summer mornings, into the cool first sunshine when everything smelt wet and sweet. Then a long day in the saddle, a

midday meal he might even help to cook over a scented fire of dry twigs, on again till sunset, supper by candle-light with pleasant bawdy conversation over a haunch of venison or a game pie, great tankards of brown ale, and no ceremony, then early to bed to sleep, without dreams, till the sunlight woke him to another pleasant day.

So the summer went by, and when the first frosts turned the ground to echoing iron he shut himself up with his books in Holyrood, snatching at the pleasures of literature with greedy hands, as if convinced that this quiet could not last, that it was itself the prelude to a wilder storm.

But that autumn, when Sir James Melville invaded his library in Holyrood, that little, book-lined room where the window was never opened and the papers never touched by inquisitive, ham-handed serving women, James knew that the storm had come.

Sir James Melville was portentous-faced, and he held a letter with a freshly-broken seal.

James kept a forefinger on the page over which he was poring. "Can it not wait?" he said. "I have so much to do here, with this translation out of the French treatise on witchcraft which brings up so much that is new. Another time I will hear it—not yet—not yet——". He pleaded, distractedly, against he knew not what.

But Melville was inexorable. "For your own honour, sir, you must leave your books," he said. "I have a letter posted urgently out of England by my brother, Master of the Household to the Queen your mother——"

"Not now," said James. "Not yet. . . ."

"It is no longer a possibility to toy with, your Majesty," said Sir James sternly. "A conspiracy organised by one Anthony Babington has been discovered. The Queen has been closely imprisoned. There is talk of trial and—execution. . . ."

“What do you want me to do?” It was a stricken cry, the cry of an irresolute creature faced with the detested necessity of action once again.

“If you wish the people to leave your own head on your shoulders,” said Sir James Melville, shocked into bluntness that James could be in doubt, “you must, Sir, needs save hers.”

## CHAPTER TWELVE

JAMES STARED UP at Sir James Melville, his face blank with the intense working of his mind. All his life he had been disconcertingly gifted with the sort of divided vision which showed him, out and beyond the incomplete enterprises of the moment, their end and consequence.

As he had drawn back, long ago, from the upper branches of the mulberry tree, so now he shrank from the messenger of crisis because of his vision of what that crisis might mean.

He saw war before him, war forced upon him, futile hopeless war which took his half-equipped armies south to be broken against the impenetrable ranks of Englishmen. But he saw, too, impinging upon that vision, the shadow of the scaffold now being built for that woman he had surprised in Esmé's locket, whom Esmé served. He saw that head held up, bloodless, in the executioner's hands, saw the very grime below the man's nails as he wrapped his fingers round her hair. Without affection, with none of the ordinary child's kindly firelit memories of comfort, shelter and content, something in his very bowels revolted from the thought of his mother's violent death. He lifted a haggard face to Sir James Melville.

"I—I cannot answer you—now. Leave me to—think."

Long ago, the Regent Mar had told him that the greatest ideal of a ruler was the peace and prosperity of his country. It had proved too new a notion for Scotland, and caused the death of its apostle, but it had appealed to James. Now he knew it for an ideal which was not new at all, but renewed again and again in the world's history, perpetually beyond the understanding of all but the

visionaries. They had tried in vain to share their vision with the cynical thousands who had listened and spat and afterwards rewarded their teachers with cross or hemlock or kindling faggots.

James had not the temerity to contemplate such an end, but these men's creed chimed with his own revulsion from the senseless bloody foolishness of war which killed the greatest impartially with the least, and left poet or philosopher to rot and stink on the battlefield like any boor haled from a brothel. Patrick, Master of Gray, had shown him some of the unpublished manuscripts of Sir Philip Sidney after his return from England where he had met him. And reading Sidney's poems, James had known sickeningly that the gulf between talent and genius was one he himself could never cross. He would never be such a poet. Sidney had written: "*my true love hath my heart and I have his*" . . . yet not a month ago he had been carried dying from the field of Zutphen, and Patrick had been frantic with rage and grief. James had been surprised at his emotion, for he had fancied Gray to be incapable of such depths. But he had certainly been sincere. "This is what war does——" he had cried savagely. "Plucks the flowers and leaves the nettles to grow rank."

James dropped his face into his hands, pressing his finger-tips over his eyes till streaks of fire seemed to blaze across his eyeballs and shut out the whirling visions. But one remained, the mirage of a crown, that crown of England now upon his godmother's head, and one day to be set softly upon his own. Must he, then, throw the lovely golden thing away, with the lives of half his soldiers, for the sake of this woman whom he had never known? At that moment, even to his secret self, he would not admit that he hated her, now that she stood in danger of death.

But for the next few months, the choice tormented him, stood between him and his books, his food, his sleep. He moved in a turmoil of indecision, shutting himself away from the petitions of all the Catholic and even some of the Protestant lords, who declared themselves ready to raise their men from every sheep-fold and cow-byre, back street and fishing boat, to show the English Queen that she had gone too far.

The common people of the cities, too, were in a fine fury of indignation. Bloody and desperate campaigns were projected in every tavern and market square. It was one thing for the Scottish Queen's own subjects to howl at her as a harlot and even to threaten her as a witch. That was a private matter between Scots, But for the English to take their Queen, *their* Queen, and actually contemplate her execution, was altogether another affair. National honour, that vital Scottish nerve, had been sharply stung into awareness of itself.

But the Kirk stood apart from the agitation. The woman was a Papist and an adulterer. She deserved death, and it made no difference to the ministers of the true religion at whose hands she met it. James, during these distracted months, ordered prayers for his mother in the churches, and found himself actually disobeyed. True, he had the impudent preachers dragged from their pulpits and replaced by obedient ones. But it did not ease his own problem to find his mother set outside the pale of the compassion of Christ's Kirk.

For James, during that bitter winter, honestly believed himself to be tempted by the Devil, that real, even visible presence of whom his recent investigations of the mysterious depths of withcraft had made him urgently aware. In his exhausted, hysterical state he was assaulted by conflicting voices which clamoured at him out of his uneasy sleep, urging him now to save his mother for the

sake of his soul and now to let her die and save his crown.

Alone, his armies could have done little, but allied with Spain and France they could have swept England. So much was clear. But on the heels of this knowledge came further doubt; would Philip of Spain, James wondered, consent to conquer England merely to put James on the throne which he had once occupied by courtesy himself? Hardly, if he knew Philip, as by repute he knew him from recent events in the Netherlands. And France would support his mother. Between them they would turn England into the cockpit for their own conflict; and England, even Scotland herself, might end as a province of Spain.

All these cold facts seeped through James's brain, quenching that spark of heroic ambition which still smouldered somewhere from the fine gallant days when he and Esmé Stuart had planned to sack the world together. Had Esmé Stuart lived, or his son been like him, had there been any one in Scotland great enough to blow on it, that spark might have blazed into the flame of a purifying cause from which James could emerge, changed and glorious as a phoenix. It was his chance; for a cause, above all a lost cause, might have saved him, even then. He was only twenty.

But at times he was as weary as an old man. He was agonised and alone. He swung between extremes of outrageous bravado and ignoble fear. At last he compromised, arranging for a pacific embassy to ride to England through the bitter winter weather of 1587. He sent Gray again, Gray who was genuinely distraught by the too complex results of his machinations, to plead for Mary Stuart's life, instead of the army which should have demanded it. With him went old Sir Robert Melville, horror-struck, both at the situation and such a way of dealing with it.



Elizabeth received them in a calm pricked through with agitation. She was no longer young; and James was not the only one who had been tormented with indecision during the last few months. Behind her were the burly, ageing Earl of Leicester, the Lord Admiral and the Chamberlain. Her thin hands gripped the arms of her chair; she forced herself to endure the formalities of greeting, to listen while Gray elaborated his mission and hinted at the temper of the Scottish people mustering north of the Border.

"Even if their leaders were cool, I doubt if they could hold them back," said Gray. "In the event—er—of a miscarriage of English justice."

"Indeed?" said Elizabeth. "And are my people here in England likely to show a meeker temper than the Scots?"

"That," smiled Gray, "your Majesty knows better than I."

"Then listen," said Elizabeth coldly. "And learn."

She had received them at the Palace of Whitehall, in the great presence chamber overlooking the street. In the dank mid-winter air, fog blurred the lights tossing in the early darkness outside. But in spite of its muffling they could hear the clamour which mounted from the crowd standing below, dewy-bearded in the murk, shouting, harsh-throated, at the lit windows of the Queen's rooms. Savage and protective, the hubbub never ceased, growing every now and then to take up some enthusiast's yell of loyalty to the Queen of England, or execration of the Queen of Scots.

"My lord of Leicester, will you be good enough to open the casement?" said the Queen.

"Madam," said the old man. "I beg you to remember the poisonous nature of the night air. These gentlemen have without doubt sufficiently taken your point. The loyalty of the people——"

But Elizabeth was out of her chair and sweeping

across the room with her urgent stride. As they fell back before her, she reached the window embrasure and with her own impatient hands threw the casement wide. The voices of the crowd leapt at them on the instant. There was something animal in the savage crash of sound which greeted the appearance of the Queen.

Words, tunes, all individual outcry vanished in that uproar, which mounted into an inexpressible ferocity of tenderness. Elizabeth stood perfectly still, her face capriciously lit by the torches swung to and fro in the crowd by men whose near neighbours seemed exalted into oblivion of the smoke, stench and sparks which were showered about them.

Standing in the shadow, Sir Robert watched the Queen's lips curve proudly into a smile, saw her draw herself up, taking deep breaths as if the tumult below gave her new life as well as comfort. Then she turned, and with a gesture, for no words could have been heard, commanded the Scottish Ambassadors to come forward, one on either hand. Immediately the quality of the uproar changed; the very crowd below seemed to leap nearer as clenched fists were raised, cudgels brandished, knives shaken among the torches. Sturdy old Sir Robert stood his ground, but Gray, more sensitive, took an involuntary step backward with an arm half-raised as if to protect his throat.

The Queen's chuckle was lost in the pandemonium, but her hands pushed both men back from the window, and at once, as if she had conducted the national orchestra into another movement, the sounds from the street changed, the snarl became a croon. Some one started a song, some one else, away on the outskirts, sawed at a fiddle, a shout of laughter greeted the eloquent, broadly expressive gesture with which Elizabeth derided the Scotsmen and reassured the crowd.

Then she herself turned from the window, nodding to Leicester to close the casement.

"Let us go into this matter," she said.

The Master of Gray, still shaken, took up his tale again. The recent demonstration had showed only too clearly that the Queen of England had the people at her back, and the howls against "Papists and plotters" in the crowd seemed to show that their only hope of saving Mary was as a private person, not as a queen.

"Madam," said Gray with his enchanting smile, and the air of anxious diffidence which was for once sincere, "why do these men, those plotters, trouble the country for our Queen's sake?"

"Because," said Elizabeth patiently, "they are Papists, and she is a Papist, and they hope that she will succeed me on my death."

"Yes. Then," urged Gray, "if she would resign her rights of that inheritance to her son, who is a Protestant, she would no longer be a danger, and might live on in peace."

"Her rights?" said Elizabeth. "She *has* no rights. She is a prisoner."

"But her son is a free prince," murmured Sir Robert. "Why should *he* not receive them at your Majesty's own hand?"

Elizabeth made an impatient gesture. "I do not understand you. What rights should he receive?"

"They mean, as I see it," said the Earl of Leicester in his great rumbling voice, "that the King of Scotland should be named in his mother's place as second person, in succession to your Majesty."

Instantly Elizabeth whipped round on him, her thin face working convulsively as the anger she had controlled surged up again, real enough now and only heightened by her instinct for the moment's need for its display.

"By God's passion," she cried, "that were to cut my own throat!" She turned furiously on Gray. "Yes, for a duchy or an earldom to yourself, you or such as you would then have some of your rascallions murder me out of hand. No, by God," down came her fists on the carved arms of her chair, "he shall never be in that place."

Sir Robert sighed. The Master of Gray, unable to believe that his personal appeal should be so utterly at a discount, still knelt, still smiled, still wheedled. But he had reckoned without that steely detachment in the woman who scarcely seemed to see him as she passionately silenced him. And Sir Robert, watching the triumph in her narrowed eyes, found himself recalling another scene, twenty years ago, when this woman had been so sharply humiliated by the motherhood of the Queen of Scots. He knew too with most unhappy certainty that Elizabeth might be the greatest Queen on earth and still unable to forgive so innocent a triumph as that motherhood with which Mary, like any bawdy wench in her own kingdom, had presumed to taunt her.

"Tell your King," she stormed, "that I have kept the crown of Scotland on his head since he was born, and if he is now fool enough to break the league between us what follows must be his responsibility, not mine."

Then Sir Robert, kneeling stiffly beside the Master, abruptly abandoned all diplomatic pretence. Tears were in his eyes as he held out his hands to the Queen.

"Madam . . . I beg you . . . spare her life . . . if only for fifteen days . . . till we see what may be done."

"No," said Elizabeth.

"Then, Madam, for one short week. . . ."

But Elizabeth was on her feet with one of her great oaths. "By God's death, no," she shouted. "Not for an hour." Without looking at the men again she gathered

up the fulness of her gown, swung down the steps and sailed superbly out. Her heels seemed to echo the finality of her refusal as she stamped across the polished boards. She went without an instant's weakening to the doors which lackeys sprang to swing apart for her.

The Earl of Leicester, bowing perfunctorily to the crestfallen Scotsmen, hurried after her, leaving his colleagues to see that they were escorted to their lodgings and defended from the crowds. Behind him the doors swung again into their place.

He found the Queen a mere couple of paces outside, halted in her tracks, her hands to her face and her eyes anguished with doubt and fear.

"Why, Madam . . ."

She clutched his arm convulsively. "If Scotland rises—it will loose France and Spain upon us——"

"Scotland will not rise," rumbled Leicester. "I showed you the letter I had from the young King——"

"Yes, yes. But tell me again how it goes."

"My religion ever moved me to hate her course," quoted the old minister comfortingly, "'although my honour constrains me to insist for her life.' Very proper sentiments, Madam, very proper indeed. But hardly those which will bring Scotland in arms against us. No, no, no. . . ."

"His religion or his honour . . ." persisted Elizabeth. "Which will win?"

The stout old man at her elbow chuckled. "Since you ask me, Madam, I should say that neither is called in question."

"Then—what——?"

"His expectations," guffawed the Earl of Leicester.

Elizabeth nodded. "I think so, too," she admitted, as they strolled along the gallery together. "And I am not much afraid that this affair will end in war. But some-

times—in the night—she is a woman and my cousin, after all.” She bit her lip. “Walsingham is adamant. Even Burleigh. . . . Oh, Robert, Robert, sometimes I wish her dead, for I know that her death will be for the good of England. But at other times—is there no other way out, even at this late hour?”

“None, Madam,” the Earl assured her. “Upon my solemn oath. You are exhausting yourself in vain. Can you not harden your heart, once and for all?”

“*You* should know that,” she flashed.

“I know it. So in this great matter. . . .”

She smiled haggardly up at him. “I will see. But why is supper so late? I must have food: what has come to them all? Do they want me to faint at their feet?”

Over his shoulder the Earl gave orders that set servants running, plates clattering, roasts slapping down on to great dishes, ushers scurrying, cooks complaining that they were told first this hour and then that, while the life of the Palace, suspended in fearful expectation while the Queen interviewed the Scottish Ambassadors, went cheerfully forward. And one more thread of the cord which held the sword over the Scottish Queen’s head frayed quietly away.

It was on the 8th of February, 1587, that the final thread parted. Surrounded by her enemies, accompanied only by a few servants whose ministrations created a piteous illusion of her lost royalty round her, Mary Stuart, great-granddaughter of Henry VII of England, was beheaded at Fotheringay. She was white-haired at forty-five.

Twenty years ago, as Englishmen sanctimoniously remembered, Darnley had been found dead at Kirk o’ Field. Now he was avenged, and their own Queen set free from a monstrous danger. News was rushed to London, where it was greeted with national rejoicing.

The guns from the Tower answered those on the ships of the river till the casements on Thames-side rattled. Church bells clashed as long as men could be found to pull the ropes, bonfires were lit up and down the streets with a specially large one, derisively circled by gibing ragamuffins, outside the house of the French Ambassador. Palings, shutters, and broom-handles were commandeered to feed the fires, while sober citizens were sufficiently transported to throw their very stools and benches into the flames.

Outside the Queen's palace a larger and loyaller crowd than ever yelled and gesticulated, pounded drums and saucepans, clashed pot-lids together, blew on trumpets and screeched on fiddles till the noise was unthinkable. But this time no casements were opened. Elizabeth had shut herself up in the remotest of her rooms, refusing to eat or sleep. During those first hours all the resources of philosophy, patriotism, personal jealousy and diplomatic triumph deserted her. The people outside the gates might roar exultingly that she had saved England from Catholicism, France and Spain, and herself from assassination in that shearing stroke at Fotheringay, but alone in her chamber in the February dusk she was merely one woman who had been the death of another, and the knowledge was heavy on her soul.

Yet still she was the Queen: the life of England must go on, and with it the diplomatic farce which made her gather all her self-possession and write hastily off to James in Scotland, disclaiming all responsibility for the "miserable accident" of his mother's death.

To James, exhausted after months of tormented indecision, the news of that death, brought to him out hunting, came on the first instant as the ending of his own personal conflict, and so with a relief so exquisite that for a few minutes he was unaware of anything else. The Devil need

tempt him no longer: the matter had been taken out of his hands. He was free at last from those whispers and counter whispers which had turned life into a misery. The Devil had shown him the kingdoms of the world and their glory which might be his in exchange for his soul. He had not made that bargain, and yet the kingdom was his. Or—had he perhaps struck the bargain after all?

Then, and then only, he became aware of the silent circle of his huntsmen, standing, bonnets in hand, beside their horses on the knoll where they had waited for the return of the messenger James had sent to Berwick for news. They were watching him curiously, speculatively, and with a sort of horror. Slowly James removed his own hat, and stood silent with them, still trying to order his own flying thoughts. His mother was dead and now he was King indeed . . . no, that was shameful . . . too soon . . . too soon . . . grief came first. Grief . . . Not for what he had lost, perhaps, but for what he had never known.

He turned on his heel and walked awkwardly away along the path which led to the hunting-lodge where they were to sleep that night, and the huntsmen turned their heads wordlessly to watch him go. One of his favourite hounds followed him for a few paces, doubtful and inquisitive. They had killed twice that day, and James had the smell of blood upon his clothes. A huntsman called it sharply, and the beast paused, to stand, stern waving, one paw lifted, hesitant. James turned the corner of the path and disappeared in the undergrowth of the forlorn winter woods. On the following morning he rode to Dalkeith and shut himself up, alone.

The news caused a tremendous commotion at Court. The Catholic lords, in particular, howled for vengeance. The Hamiltons demanded to be allowed to burn Newcastle and lay waste to the north of England. Young



Francis Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, achieved a sensation after his own heart by tramping into the audience chamber in full armour.

"Why, Francis——" James raised his eyebrows.

Bothwell clashed his mailed right hand dramatically on his breastplate. "There is no other dule weed for any man of spirit, cousin," he declared.

James looked at him with distaste, and invited him coldly to go and change his clothes. "There are some of us who wear our weeds nearer our hearts," said James. He had failed to save his mother's life: as long as he lived the memory of that failure would rise before him in every moment of despair. But now that the thing was irrevocably done, there would be only the hollowest satisfaction in ruining his country to avenge his mother's death. He had counted the cost of peace, the price had been paid, and now the country should have value for what they had bought. He would keep the treaty with England unbroken.

In this he was supported by his shrewd, cynical Lord Chancellor, Sir John Maitland of Lethington, younger brother of his mother's counsellor who had been twice a turncoat, yet died for her at last beside Kirkcaldy of Grange. Elizabeth, said Maitland, could surely not last much longer, and with the death of his mother James was now her heir, however much she might dislike the fact. As for the nobles and their threats, Maitland shrugged. His Majesty knew them for what they were, more promise than performance. Let the King, urged Maitland wisely, make a gesture by exiling the Master of Gray, who had played so shamefully, it seemed, for both sides. Had he not actually urged Mary's death, *quia mortui non mordent*, upon Elizabeth's ministers?

James agreed. Gray was expelled from the country, and after a period of noisy indignation, the temper of the

people, even the most belligerent lords, began to change. After all, a war with England would have been a costly, profitless business. They were probably better off as they were when they came to think it over. The King was a well-meaning enough lad, though given to dreams of better government, which meant, they suspected, that he intended to take the power out of their hands into his own. Just let him try, they told each other loudly, aware with some discomfort that the King's greatest chance of success lay in his popularity with the common people, coupled with their own empty purses.

In the old days, when a laird lived like a king himself on his own lands, he could afford to turn his back on higher authority. But now, in these hard times of cash payments and greedy, profit-gathering merchants, things were not so simple. Was not one of Gentlemen of the King's Chamber a mere merchant's son? Times had changed indeed. The hereditary lords uneasily awaited the celebration of the King's coming of age in June, devoutly hoping that he intended to impose no more new-fangled notions upon his Court.

As it happened, James had a surprise scheme ready for them. He held, reasonably enough, that freedom from wars abroad was meaningless if Scotland were still to be battle-ridden with the wranglings of her great nobles at home. So when the city of Edinburgh begged permission to arrange the greatest Masque the city had ever seen to celebrate his majority, James thanked the spokesman but explained that he would provide his own Masque instead, a spectacle which had never been seen in the country since history began.

This announcement created some stir: the citizens, always ready for any novelty, sent rumours flying higher and swifter than the swallows round the steeple of St. Giles. The city was once more hung with banners and

“Hurray!” yelled the fuddled chorus.

It was some time before James could impress upon his audience that he was serious, longer before he could make them understand that he intended the demonstration to be made at once and before the assembled citizens of Edinburgh, that he actually proposed, on this summer Sabbath evening of his twenty-first birthday, to lead them personally up the High Street to the Mercat Cross, each man arm-in-arm with his worst enemy.

There was a good deal of laughter, some swearing, and various protests, but at last, thanks to the general good humour, the procession was actually formed. James himself led it, with Lord Hamilton irritably chewing the ends of his moustache on one side of him and the Lord Chancellor Maitland smiling to himself on the other. Behind him, sheepish or sulky, swayed and stumbled the great nobles, each supporting or supported by his hereditary enemy.

News of what was happening had already got about, and the citizens were all ready for them, waiting with armfuls of flowers raided from the gardens at the back of the Canongate to throw down before the emissaries of peace. It was a strange scene for the grey old buildings, which had known many invaders greeted with arrows or bullets but few showers of roses before. Unfortunately for James's lofty purpose, the first emotion roused at the sight of the carefully-marshalled, slightly unsteady ranks of their betters was one of uncontrollable mirth. Those in the first ranks of spectators laughed themselves sore, doubled up and smacked their knees, punching each other in the ribs with joy at this remarkable spectacle.

“Look ye, there go Angus and Montrose, handfasted for all the world like brothers. Eh, but mercy, did ever ye see sich faces of black disgust on mortal men?”

“Look, look . . . yon's Crawford side by side wi' the

Master of Glamis . . . as mim and meek as if he were at the oxtar o' the de'il himsel'. . . .”

The procession plodded on in a gale of laughter, pelted with flowers, assailed with the conflicting noises of innumerable musical instruments. At the Mercat Cross the proceedings became more decorous by reason of the presence of the magistrates and the town guard, and the nobles took their seats round the table which had been prepared. James made another speech proclaiming universal peace, gave orders that prisoners for debt should be released from the Tolbooth as a sign of goodwill, signalled for trumpets to sound and cannon to shoot while he drank to the health of his people and commanded each noble to show himself before all Scotland as he toasted his new friend.

The people cheered and pelted the banqueters with flowers, while the men at the table snatched handfuls of sweetmeats and tossed them to the screaming groups at the stairheads. The noise fairly shook the surrounding buildings and sent startled pigeons flapping from their niches on the old church.

Andrew Haliburton, standing on his balcony beside his wife, looked curiously down at James as he lounged past below the balcony at the end of the banquet, an arm crooked with that of the nobleman on each side of him. His wife shook her head and sighed, for to her experienced eye the King's gaiety seemed unreal; he looked as terrorised and worn out as if he had in fact, as well as fancy, wrestled with the Devil himself.

“So he's just one-and-twenty,” she said. “Dear save us, he looks older than Walter that's a dozen years ahead of him.”

“Aye,” said her husband, “he does that. It's a bad business, a bad business. A country should make its kings, not break them.”

"Well, maybe it's just the want of a good wife. I've heard great tales about the Danish ambassadors, that's been here to seek him for their Princess. You wait, once he's married, he'll look a different body, poor lad. Eh, and I wish I could see Walter settled as well. There's a dozen girls ready to run to him if he lifted a finger. But will he—*no!*"

"He'll take his time, the same as I took mine," said Andrew Haliburton with a chuckle. "And none the worse for it either. Eh, how they're screeching down by the Cross. They'll have got at the table now the gentry's left it. Tch, tch, they'll knock everything to kindling——" He shaded his eyes from the arrowy shafts of the westering sun, and peered anxiously at the riot below for a glimpse of his crimson velvet.

"Tuts, never mind the damage for once," urged his wife. "It's a fine sight, setting an example to the bairns with all the handfasting and kindness. And real well thought on, with the flowers, and the lords drinking peace on earth, and the music——"

"Tuts, play-acting," said Andrew Haliburton glumly. "If one of their fine promises outlasts yon puffs of smoke from the Castle guns I'll be astonished. And if my Lord Provost thinks," he added, with a quick change of tone, "that he'll get me to take back the velvet that half the nobility's been casting wine and sugar sweeties right and left over, he's mistaken, an' all."

The truce between the great houses did not, in fact, prove durable, though it was prolonged to some extent by the need for national defence in the following year of the Armada. James was still determined that the country should observe the treaty with England, not only for honour's sake, but because the prospect of playing dogsbody to a Spanish Conquest did not appeal to him.

So the Armada came and went, and in England the

popular worship of Elizabeth mounted to its peak. In Scotland James surveyed his godmother's triumphs with reserve. She might be the Gloriana of her age, but when she began to consider herself a matchmaker it was time something was done to show that her authority ended with the Border line. Ex-friends of Arran's had, of course, made it their business to tell James about the understanding reached by Arran and Elizabeth before Arran's disgrace. Between them, it seemed, they had arranged for James to be kept unmarried till the young Englishwoman of his godmother's choice was old enough to be presented.

The news made James furious. He had replied meekly to all his godmother's scolding letters and listened to a number of lectures from her ambassadors. But in the matter of his marriage he rebelled. He would marry whom he liked, and as soon as he liked, too. He would not wait for a princess to be approved by his tyrannical godmother, no, not if she had a dozen crowns of England to bestow.

Elizabeth, unaware of the resentment mounting against her, now let her godson know with just a little too much emphasis that she would prefer him to consider the young English heiress, Arabella Stuart. As a result James immediately sent out two embassies in search of other brides. One went to inspect the daughter of the King of Navarre, while another continued the interrupted negotiations with Denmark, whose late King before his death had offered to make over the Orkneys as part of his daughter's dowry. In due course both embassies returned, with offers, gossip and miniatures for James's inspection.

Officially James took a fortnight to decide. Actually he knew what he meant to do in ten seconds. Katherine of Navarre was elderly and not even the careful portrait could make her seem beautiful. In point of fact, as one of

the returned ambassadors whispered, the poor woman was a fright. So it hardly needed his godmother's inevitable instructions to conclude an alliance with the house of Navarre to make James fling the French miniature across the room and turn his attention to the girl in Denmark.

He took the Princess Anna's portrait in his palm and looked at it for a long time. Was it possible that his fortune had changed, that after all the loneliness of these long years since Esmé died he was to find that gay, that glorious gift of comfort and companionship? The smooth formal oval showed a girl of fourteen in the robes of a great lady, looking over her shoulder with a prim little air of decorum, just tinged with laughter which twisted the corners of her wide mouth but left her eyes unstirred. James began to smile to himself as he looked; slowly, mistrustfully, as he had smiled at Esmé Stuart when he first came to change the face of his world. And so, perhaps, this girl who looked sideways at him out of her picture might change the world for him again.

He lifted his head. "I wish the Earl Marshal to set out for Denmark at once," he said. "At once, at once. . . ." He tapped his foot impatiently on the sheepskin at his feet.

"As you wish, sir," said Maitland with a sigh. He did not approve of the Danish venture, and Queen Elizabeth had made it clear that she regarded it with the deepest displeasure. But he knew at a glance when opposition was so much wasted breath. "And what will you write to her Majesty of England?" he ventured to inquire.

But James was looking at the miniature again. Maitland coughed with reproachful emphasis.

"Eh? What? The Queen of England? I shall not write at all," said James.

"Her Majesty will wonder . . ." hinted Maitland.

"That will be a pleasant change for her Majesty," said James.

Slipping the miniature into his pocket, he walked out of the room, while behind him Maitland silently raised his eyebrows to the assembled Council.

If the diplomats were doubtful of the expediency of the marriage, young Francis Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, was as candidly opposed as Elizabeth to any marriage at all. While James remained single, he might not altogether unreasonably consider himself his heir, for his double claim, on father and mother's side, was quite as convincing as that of the stolid little boy, Ludovic, Duke of Lennox, now grown into an equally honest and stolid young man with more interest in farms than Courts, and grudging the time wasted from his estates in attending the King dutifully about the country in the exacting new office of Chamberlain. For all Lennox cared, Bothwell might inherit the crown of Scotland and welcome. It seemed to cost its wearers trouble enough.

But that strange, erratic young man, Bothwell, did not count such a cost. He was as ambitious as he was unstable; touched with genius or with madness; it was difficult to say which. He had inherited something of the Stuart charm, something more of the Hepburn violence, and would have liked to restore the old ways when those who could take possession of the King might dictate to the country. He forgot that the King's majority made a considerable difference to the position. And the prospect of James's actual marriage seemed to goad him out of all caution. When it seemed likely to become serious he persuaded the young Earl of Huntly, with whom James had always been on good terms, to undertake a madcap project of kidnapping. It failed, and James did not make much of it. His cousin Francis was the sort of person who liked to make himself a continual nuisance, agitating the



peacefully-minded into a ferment with tales of their accumulated wrongs until he himself was given a post of sufficient responsibility to soothe his inflated conceit. Presently Francis would settle down: all he needed was to be given office in the government and a chance of forgetting his own wrongs in putting other men right.

But meanwhile young Bothwell wandered aggressively about, doing what he could to obstruct the project of the Danish marriage, getting himself talked about, as usual, but this time for his rumoured association with the Scottish witches, that secret society which contained all sorts of eccentrics, from ladies of title to demented servant girls who declared themselves capable of raising the Devil and interfering variously with the course of nature.

Young Bothwell did not really believe their boasting assurances, but the streak of craziness in his make-up gave him a certain sympathy with their dark rites. He occasionally attended their unholy Sabbaths, and even allowed them to name him as their patron and Grand Master, second only to the Devil himself. For he was sufficiently cynical to argue that if the whole business were nonsense no harm could come to him from it. And if the old women could raise storms which would overwhelm the fleet which brought this abominable little princess from Denmark to marry that poor fish his cousin, well, so much to the good. There might be nothing in it, but everybody he knew believed in witchcraft, and he had spoken to a man whose brother had known a woman who had seen the Devil burst from the ground in front of her, black as coal and stinking of the Pit, with great horns starting from his head. Even the Kirk were afraid of the witches. If not, why did they burn them so persistently and torture them to discover their secrets?

Better to be on their side, if they could really work miracles; and if he were accused it would be simple enough to swear that he knew nothing of it and the old women had incriminated him out of spite. He would take care that there was no evidence, and it would do no harm to see what the witches could do. So he went discreetly about his investigations of the witches' coven at North Berwick, which would be a useful centre should the question of raising storms on the North Sea arise, and he took some care that his disreputable activities should not come to his cousin's ears meanwhile.

But James had forgotten him. He had forgotten everything which did not bear directly on his Danish princess, and his own tumultuous hopes and fears. The project was going forward according to plan, but too slowly, far too slowly, to satisfy him. He counted the days which separated him still from his princess as if she were his last hope. So, in a sense, she was. There was still time for a great devotion, a clever woman to change his character from the rigid mould into which it was setting. His response to this prospect of happiness was the last passionate stirring of his youth, submerged so long beneath the formalities and tediums of his office as his body was weighed down by the robes of state.

The Earl Marshal, with a suitable escort, set off on June 18th, 1589, and on August 20th the Princess was married to the King's proxy in Denmark. In Scotland James waited impatiently at Craigmillar Castle, the miniature on its gold chain round his neck, warm and hard against his chest. Time passed with unendurable deliberation. James wrote love poems and fancied himself, for the first time in his life, proudly companion to the heroes of the old romantic ballads, to that other James who had also sought his bride on the far side of those hungry seas. Slowly though the time went, it had

its own delicious quality of anticipation, savoured drop by drop. So James was happy as he waited, confident that at last his life, which had been so prosaic and yet so terrible, was about to burgeon into the perfect double blossom of romance.

But while he sighed and scribbled and looked years younger in his impatience, the witches met in the churchyard at North Berwick and brewed the most fearful charms they knew, and some combination of weather conditions brought about convulsions for which the Devil's advocates gleefully took credit. The Queen, with her escort of eleven fine ships commanded by the Danish Admiral, embarked for Scotland just before the weather broke. Three times the fleet were in sight of the Scottish shore, and three times they were beaten back by devastating gales. The witches screamed and the storms raged, cats were christened, tied about with dismembered parts of dead men and flung into the sea. Toads were hung up by the heels, men and women sworn to the service of the Devil took hands and danced between the gusts round the tombstones of North Berwick churchyard, showing their devotion to their master by kissing the buttocks of his representative who had annexed the unsuspecting minister's place in the pulpit, all hung with black for this diabolic midnight service.

So the witches danced and rumours raged; strange bale-fires had been seen, thunder cracked overhead, tiles blew off honest men's roofs, women gave birth to monsters, haystacks flew through the skies, and dumb beasts spoke. The fleet with the Queen on board was finally obliged to put back for shelter to the Norwegian coast, and the Queen with her suite took up their quarters at the little town of Upslo, while the wiseacres shook their heads and said that she would not now be able to sail till the following summer.

It was cruel news for James. He refused, in fact, to accept it. He ordered his cousin, Bothwell, lately made Lord Admiral, to cure him of irresponsibility, to fit out half a dozen ships and fetch the Queen home at once. Bothwell made excuses, brandished alarming bills, and doubted whether he could undertake to equip an adequate fleet. James fumed and cursed, and took his troubles to the Lord Chancellor, the discreet Maitland, who sympathised surprisingly with his master's state of mind. In point of fact, the Chancellor felt that the thing, wise or not, was now done: the Princess had been married by proxy. So the sooner the marriage became fact and the Succession was assured by the birth of an heir the better for every one. He announced that he would immediately fit out a sound ship and bring the Queen to Scotland himself.

James was delighted. But in a dazzling flash of excitement he determined to better the plan. He himself would make the perilous journey, he would be at last a real knight-errant, setting out to brave incredible dangers in order to bring home his bride. Never had there been such a chance: the prospect shook him right out of his habitual caution. But he had just enough discretion left to keep his plans to himself. He knew the Council well, those heavy men given to stroking their beards and shaking their heads over his suggestions. They would never allow it. Very well; they should not know. He would set out first and leave explanations behind him.

James spent the time left while the ship was being fitted out in appointing a Council of Regency to govern the country during his absence and in writing and re-writing a stately letter to the Councillors, full of dignified and elaborate explanations through which his new, intoxicating ardour broke every now and then in an unceremonious, vivid phrase. He took care to clear the Lord Chancellor Maitland of all connivance, and incident-

ally, to rob him of all credit for his own precious scheme.

"I know," he wrote, "that if I had told him, he would be blamed for putting it into my head, knowing the burden he daily bears of leading me by the nose, as if I were an unreasonable creature or a bairn that could do nothing for himself."

The Council of Regency was to include wise Sir Robert Melville as Vice-Chancellor in Maitland's absence, the young Duke of Lennox, the madcap Bothwell (sobered, apparently, into discretion by his office), Lord Hamilton, and others, the members to be resident by turns in Edinburgh during the absence of the King. As an extra precaution Master Robert Bruce, chief minister of the city, was made an extraordinary member of the Council, responsible for the quiet and orderly behaviour of the Kirk.

At last it was all done. His secretary patiently copied out James's violently-scribbled draft, James set his signature at the foot and tossed the quill exuberantly across the room so that it stuck quivering in a valuable tapestry specially commissioned by his royal grandfather from the spinners of Arras.

At the door stood Walter, grinning broadly and carrying cloaks. They were to ride from Craigmillar to Leith by night, leaving behind the small party of men-at-arms which was to escort them on arriving at the port, shortly before dawn.

"Is it time—at *last*?" asked James.

"Yes, sir."

"Then come in, man. In God's name don't dawdle there! Give me my hat. The feather is broken; lord, have I none better than that?"

"I will send for another." Walter took it back and hurried off, while James, in mounting impatience, stood by the door and drummed on its panels, convinced

that they would be late. At last Walter was back with a different hat, a high-crowned black felt in which James fancied himself. He crushed it on, and they made their way quietly out by a side entrance to the yard where the horses waited in the ghost-lit autumn night, across which the leaves from the crooked trees scurried past the taut bow of the young moon.

They rode by unfrequented ways to the fish-smelling, dusky harbour of Leith, where the King's ship and three which were to escort it curtsied on the tide, their bulks black against the first light from the east, their sailors busy by the light of bobbing lanterns over the last preparations for departure with the ebb.

The surly boatman who rowed them out did not recognise the King as he grumbled at the early hour and spat at the moderation of Walter's tip. James laughed and clapped the man on the back. Poor fellow, he had a dull enough life. *He* was not setting sail in the dawn like the hero of a ballad. A rope-ladder rustled down. They swung themselves aboard.

Walter had expected James to go below and join the other important people now drinking success to their enterprise in the master's cabin. But the King shook his head. The bustle on deck, the cursing, the busy flurry of ropes and men which attended the hoisting of sail were too new, too exciting. He stood, wrapped in his plain cloak against the dawn wind which blew steadily from the shore, craning his head back to watch the scarlet sail shaken out above him.

The dim, unawakened land began to slip astern. James leant on the rail, watching the water as it recoiled from the ship's sides in a steadily quickening rhythm. Far above, the first sunshine began to creep down the splendid sail. James turned his back on Scotland and his face towards the sea.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ANNA, QUEEN-ELECT OF SCOTLAND, sat in front of her looking-glass between two tall candles which were gnarled out of their usual symmetry by the gout of melted wax which had spilled down their sides. The peaked flames tossed to and fro in the vicious draughts which not even the furs hung across door and windows could entirely banish from the low-ceilinged, pine-panelled bedroom with its big tiled stove and steep-sided bed.

Every now and then Anna twitched her head free from the hands of the patient Maid of Honour who was trying to braid up her long fair hair for the night and leaned forward to break off a length of wax which had congealed into strange shapes like the resin which oozed from a wound on a pine-trunk in the forests. Anna looked at it with interest, then held it into the flame and watched it melt softly into clear wax again.

"Highness, if you would sit still for five minutes it would be done."

Anna's firm red lips were thrust forward into a pout, and her sandy brows drawn together in a frown of childish irritation at the comb which had already scratched her forehead twice. She knew she was prolonging the detestable business of hair-brushing and braiding, but she was in the sort of mood which made her willing to endure the extra discomfort for the sake of exasperating her young and pretty lady-in-waiting, whose fingers, as Anna very well knew, were rigid with her desire to give her charge's long braids a good and

hearty tweak. For Anna had already refused to change her gown for a chamber-robe while her hair was dressed for the night, and now she was making the dressing of her hair as difficult as she could as a protest against her mother's choice of waiting ladies.

"Why should I sit still because you are clumsy?" said Anna pettishly.

"So that I do not hurt you, Highness," said Helga Ingerstrom.

"You must call me Majesty now. I am the Queen of Scotland," said Anna, drawing her thin shoulders back.

Helga Ingerstrom raised her eyes wordlessly to the carved wood cornice as her hands worked nimbly amongst the braids.

"And do not make faces, for I can see you in the looking-glass."

The much tried young lady-in-waiting bit her lip, struggled for a few seconds, then burst into helpless laughter. Anna sat looking straight in front of her, her lips pursed and her back rigid with offended dignity. "My brother Christiern is King of Denmark since my father died. If he can be King at eleven, then I can be Queen at fourteen. I will have you dismissed for insolence."

"Your Majesty——" said Helga unsteadily, "must pardon me. I—I—have not yet accustomed myself to the new dignity——"

"Then finish braiding my hair at once. I am frozen so far from the stove. I hate this abominable hamlet where all the force of the sea breaks so that we might almost as well be on it again. Ugh—*how* I hate it. And the wind is worse. It kept me awake all last night."

"Tch, tch," said Helga Ingerstrom unbelievably. Anna had adenoids and a tendency to snore so that from her truckle bed on the far side of the stove it was only too easy for Helga to know when her charge was asleep.



"Yes, all night long," said Anna dramatically. "I was thinking of the King of Scotland who is coming to fetch me like one of the heroes they sing of——"

"It must be wonderful to be betrothed to a young King who will risk these seas for you," said Helga wistfully. Her glance at the sedate little girl who now stood up to have her dress unhooked added that in her opinion the most unlikely people had all the luck.

"Yes," said Anna. "And I hope his ship will not go to the bottom. Though of course even if it does, I shall still be Queen of Scotland."

"You are not yet married to his person, your Majesty; only to his proxy," Helga reminded her, as she knelt down to struggle with the complicated arrangement of the hooped farthingale.

"That is all that is required," said Anna, as she held up her arms for the heavy gown to be pulled over her head. "I am as married now as I need ever be——"

Helga Ingerstrom giggled.

"In order to be a Queen, that's to say," amended Anna, who was, like most children of her time, no ignorant romantic on matters of sex.

"You wait till the King arrives," said the lady-in-waiting, as she pulled, none too gently, at the billowing brocade, encrusted with gold and jewels, which scratched at Anna's nose as it passed.

"Stop," Anna cried, imprisoned in the stifling folds. "Something is hurting me. You must undo the fastening——"

"I *have* undone the fastening, your Majesty," said Helga.

"You have not. Something is hurting my——"

But the Maid of Honour had lost the last of her patience after a day of suppressed exasperation. With a sudden twist she dragged the gown inside out over the girl's

head, pulling the sleeves hastily over Anna's wrists till she stood free of the stomacher and farthingale of a great lady, an indignant child in a white shift with her hair on end and a genuine scratch down one side of her rather pointed nose. Her mouth was working furiously and she was blinking away tears of pain.

"How dare you?" she said. "I will tell the Queen-Mother that you are incompetent—and insolent as well. To dare say that I am not already Queen of Scotland——" She had raised her hand to strike at Helga, who was quietly disentangling the complicated structure of canvas and whalebone and wire which composed the gown's lining, when a noise in the corridor outside checked her with one arm drawn back and the tears of temper still smeared across her cheeks.

Outside men were trampling, shouting. An unknown voice was raised in what she recognised for English, but could not understand. Other voices, speaking Danish, expostulated. Then everything seemed to happen at once. Helga rushed to the door, was flung back behind it as it opened and a strange young man stormed in, his hat still on his head, his cloak sodden and his boots squelching water at every step.

He did not pause on the threshold, did not even remove his hat, but came straight across the room on a whirling draught which beat the candle-flames level with the floor, and received the stinging smack which had been intended for Helga as he swept Anna off her feet into an embrace which was nearly as wet and cold as the night outside.

Anna began a scream which died for want of breath as his mouth came groping down on her own and clung there, while his hands, struggling free from the folds of his heavy cloak, felt over her bare shoulders, plucked her away from him to search for her breasts. They were avid,

awkward hands, and they blundered as if they had never rested on a woman's body before, while his lips forced hers apart as if he never hoped to have a chance of kissing one again. Anna felt as if she were drowning, and as James wrenched his lips from her mouth to plunge down towards her throat she let out a piercing scream for help.

James released her at once, so abruptly that she would have fallen had not Helga hurried forward with outstretched arms. He might not understand the language of his bride, but at least the terror in her voice required no translation, and he stood before her, still breathing unsteadily, but with such an expression of astonished distress that the crowd of gentlemen in the doorway could not keep from laughing. Then a white-haired Dane, the Chancellor, stepped forward, bowed deeply to James, and explained in fluent English that the Princess had not realised who he was, that his greeting had taken her just a little by surprise, that he must be patient with her youth and inexperience.

James put his hand to his head, encountered his hat, and dragged it off, much disconcerted, while Helga tried in vain to make the terrified Anna release her and turn to face James again. The Chancellor spoke to her, first with gentle deference and afterwards with some asperity, while James stood with mud and water oozing from him, dumbly watching what seemed to be the downfall of all his pinnacled hopes.

But the scene was briskly terminated by the arrival of the Queen-Mother, the gruff-voiced, high-bosomed Sophia of Mecklenburg, that celebrated domestic disciplinarian, who scattered the inquisitive onlookers about their business with half a dozen words and a single tremendous gesture, greeted James with kindly authority, ordered Helga to throw a robe about the Princess and the old Chancellor to escort the King of Scotland from the room

and to see to his refreshment. If he would return presently she would undertake to have his bride ready to receive him.

What the Queen-Mother commanded was done. It was always done, the Chancellor explained to James over a flagon of strong spirit in one of the other chambers of the little Norwegian village inn which had been hastily set apart for the accommodation of his suite. Yes, indeed, he added, as the warmth of the spirit and the glow from the open door of the blue and white stove began to melt discretion in the flame of good-fellowship, whenever the voice of the Queen-Mother was heard booming through the corridors of the Palace of Cronenburg at Copenhagen, men scattered right and left. So. He sketched a gesture of dissolution into thin air.

James smiled and rubbed his numbed hands. He was beginning to feel better. He had a godmother, he admitted, who answered very much to that description, though the Danish Queen-Mother would make about three of her. She was just a wrinkled little scrap of a thing, they said; yet she terrorised everybody at the English Court.

The old Chancellor closed one eye in an amiable wink. "They're all alike, these women who rule," he said, "no matter whether they're as brawny as a Spanish priest or just a handful of bones like a back-streets cat. It's the spirit that does it. Now my wife . . . God rest her . . . was the very same. . . ."

On the threshold Helga Ingerstrom dropped a curtsy and said that her Majesty the Queen-Mother was pleased to invite his Scottish Majesty to the Princess's chamber, and suggested that he might leave his cloak behind to be dried against the morning.

"I will come," said James, when the Chancellor had

translated. Helga disappeared, and James began to kick off his boots. "Is my baggage here yet?"

"It should be in the next room, your Majesty."

"Then have the goodness," mumbled James, busy with the points of his hose, "to tell any of my gentlemen who may be there with it to bring here the best suit which was packed, with the white hose—and the shoes of Spanish leather——"

"I will, sir."

"And the ruffled shirt, too," cried James recklessly.

"It is—er—close on midnight——" ventured the Chancellor.

"I do not care if it is morning," said James, stripping hurriedly in the pleasant warmth of the stove, "for I must show her that we in Scotland are not always blundering boors."

"H'm. Yes," said the Chancellor, who did not approve of giving way to the tantrums of young baggages such as the Princess Anna. "Do not make too much of these tears, your Majesty. Her mother will teach the Princess her duty."

"Her *duty*? But I want her to—to *like* me," cried James in dismay. Had he crossed those savage seas to find a terrified child who must be coerced into receiving his attentions? He had frightened her, and his own memories of terror made him shrink from inflicting terror on any other creature. "I want her to be happy with me," he mumbled awkwardly, disturbed by the cynical detachment of the old courtier.

"H'm, yes, so the Princess intends to be, I fancy," said the Chancellor. "Though possibly after her own fashion. If I might advise you, sir, it would not be to spare the rod—but," with a hasty gesture, "naturally that is no affair of mine. Since you wish to see her again to-night——" he raised long fingers to check the suspicion

of a yawn, "I will send one of your gentlemen to attend——"

"Do, do," urged James, already dragging off his shirt. The Chancellor went out, closing the door quietly behind him, and James stamped impatiently about the bare, uncouth-looking little room, half-naked and shivering as much from excitement as from the chill of his wet clothes, till at last Walter hurried in with a pile of travel-crushed satins and ruffled cambrics, the whole topped by a pair of high-heeled shoes specially ordered from France.

"Lord, man, how long you've been," grumbled James, snatching at the first garment which came to hand, and dropping the elegant ruby satin trunks on to a dripping heap of discarded clothes.

Walter, whose fondness for James was as large and deliberate and reliable as he was himself, did not protest that he had only that instant succeeded in tracing the King's baggage and having it conveyed to the series of primitive little wooden hutches which the hotel called the royal suite of rooms. He handed his master the garments in the proper order, and nodded comfortingly when James stood ready at last, anxiously peering over his shoulder in an attempt to appraise the fit of his crimson coat. "Is that all right?" James asked, whirling on his heels.

"Everything, sir," said Walter. "The colour is good, the cut discreet. You need have no fear——"

"It is not a question of fear," said James, who was always touchy on that subject. "Merely of correcting an unfortunate impression."

"Yes, I see," soothed Walter. "You cannot fail to please her now, sir. Will you not set out?"

"Er—yes—I suppose so," said James, looking round, now that everything was ready, for an excuse to delay. "Are you sure that I have not forgotten—what if she

screams again at the sight of me—I could not bear——”

“She will not do that,” said Walter. And he opened the door with that broad, encouraging grin which he had never been able to change for the more reserved smiles of experienced courtiers.

In the corridor a couple of Danish gentlemen-in-waiting were ready to convey James to his bride’s room, and Walter turned back with a sigh and a grimace to collect the sodden garments which James had flung down here, there and everywhere. He had just retrieved one boot from behind the stove and the other from beside the window and was wondering what to do next when the door suddenly opened and a young woman shot in, crimson-faced with the laughter she was trying to suppress with one fist crammed against her mouth. At the sight of Walter she stopped short, stood for a few seconds of confusion, then smiled.

“What a night, what a night!” she exclaimed. Her voice was low and broken deliciously with laughter. “I have a message for his lordship from her Majesty the Queen-Mother—and I thought to find——”

She looked round the room as if she expected to find the Chancellor behind the stove, then glanced back over her shoulder at Walter, still standing with the wet clothes in his hands, staring and silent.

“I can speak French or German instead of English, if you prefer,” she taunted his dumbness.

“English will do,” said Walter. “How do you speak it so well?”

“My mother was Scots,” explained Helga. “That is why her Majesty made me serve the Princess, so that I might teach her, in readiness for this moment. But she is lazy—ah, but how lazy—and she will not learn. Now I——” Helga gave an impish little pirouette, “will learn anything you can teach me. I am to come to Scotland

with the *Queen*——” she made a face, then burst out into uncontrollable laughter again.

“Oh, I am sorry, but if you could have seen them in there, you would have laughed too. There they sat like two children at school with the *Queen-Mother* between them, her hands folded on her stomach, so. And her chins disposed on her bosom, so. It is not possible to show you properly unless one also has double chins. But there she sits, and looks from one to the other as she translates, very slow, while the *Princess* pouts——” The irrepressible Helga contrived to twist her round face into a truly remarkable expression of brooding ferocity, relaxing next instant into chuckling delight. “She sits on the edge of her stool, and twists her gown, while the young King sits opposite, licking his lips like a little dog which sees its dinner out of reach.” Helga drew the bright tip of her tongue across her lower lip, and pushed her head forward, twitching her eyelids in faithful imitation of James’s nervous habit.

“Are you in good health . . . I hope that you will be happy in Scotland . . . I look forward to meeting your brother, the King . . . Thank you, the gales we endured were nothing out of the way . . . it was pleasant to venture something in the cause of love. . . .” Helga put up a hand to brush back a lock of hair and tilted up her chin in James’s very gesture of apprehensive knight-errantry.

Walter flushed slowly with dour, obstinate resentment. “You are speaking of my master, the King,” he reminded her.

Helga looked up at him in innocent surprise. “Yes, I suppose so,” she said. “Why not? Do you not laugh at him, then?”

“No,” said Walter.

“No?” Helga’s eyes were round with mischievous



surprise. "But here at Court everybody is laughed at, in safety behind their backs, of course. It would be a poor, sad business otherwise. If the Queen-Mother knew what we call her, we waiting women, between ourselves, well, we all would be sent home again to-morrow. The little King himself laughs at his solemn Councillors of Regency. Yes indeed. It is cheerful enough. Tell me," she leaned mockingly closer, "does your master always lick his lips when he makes love to a woman? Or is his tongue too big for his mouth, so that he cannot——"

But Walter had picked up James's boots and walked out of the room without waiting for her to finish her sentence. Helga Ingerstrom, one finger raised to her lips in a comical gesture of dismay, stood in the middle of the empty room, staring at the planks of the rough door which Walter had closed crisply behind him. As she stared, she flushed, and as she flushed her eyes darkened with the temper which made her presently stamp a foot upon the boards, and afterwards wrench the door open with an angry comment ready. But Walter had wandered off down the corridor in search of somewhere to dry his master's clothes. Helga Ingerstrom could see him standing at the head of the steep wooden staircase, peering doubtfully into the smokily-lit babel of the hall below. She knew that he was looking for the way to the kitchens, and guessed that he could speak no Danish. But she swung her skirts about her and sailed past without a glance.

In the Princess's bedchamber James was not faring well either. His prospective mother-in-law embarrassed him to a state of wretched incoherence as she waited for him to make appropriate conversation to the heavy-eyed, sulky Anna, who sat fingering the silver crucifix which dangled at the end of the beads she wore, and looking up at him from under her long lashes. It had not occurred

to anybody, in the excitement of the moment, to suggest conducting the conversation in French which both James and Anna understood, and so the Queen-Mother's raucous translations from Danish to English seemed the only means of bridging the bottomless gulf of incomprehension.

"Hold up your head, Anna," commanded the Queen-Mother. "He is a King, and your husband now whether you like it or not. If he is not pleased he may try to go back on his bargain, and heaven knows it has been hard enough to get him up to scratch. If it had not been for Scottish greed and the hope that you would bring the Orkney islands in your dowry, the Scottish Council would have been see-sawing yet. Can you not smile at him, you poor creature? Do you suppose he has come here to marry a weeping statue? Say something agreeable before I set my hands about your ears."

"I hope he will like Denmark," mumbled Anne.

"The Princess," translated the Queen-Mother, turning towards the anxious James with a wide and shark-like smile, "says that she is living for the opportunity of showing your Majesty all the charms of our beautiful country which welcomes you so eagerly."

"I—I am as fortunate as Dante, in such a heavenly guide," said James, with a shy glance at Anna.

"He is talking about some one called Dante, whoever that may be. But he calls you a heavenly guide, and I only hope he's right, though from past experience I doubt it. Go on, girl. Am I to be kept out of my bed all night to invent courtesies for a pair of tongue-tied fish?"

"Well, did I ask him to come charging in here like a bull from the upper pastures?" demanded Anna indignantly. "Tell him that I hope he will have some new dances to teach me at the Scottish Court."

"The Princess," paraphrased the Queen-Mother, "looks

forward to sharing the responsibilities of your royal estate."

"It will be my—my dearest privilege," said James eagerly, "to bear her burdens as well as my own. I could not have her happiness shadowed with the weariness of those everlasting state affairs——"

"He says you're to keep your nose out of matters which don't concern you once you get to Scotland, and just you remember it, my girl."

"And what does he think I care for his dusty old government? I was talking about dancing. Do you think he'll let me have any pleasures at all?" demanded Anna.

"Well, you've only yourself to thank for it if he doesn't. It was you who pestered your poor father to find you a King for a husband, and if you think you can have your pleasures as well, you'll find yourself mistaken. Since you can find nothing worth saying to each other you had better take time to prepare some fine phrases against to-morrow. I am going to bed," said the Queen-Mother.

She rose, while Anna and James rose dutifully with her. Queen Sophia gathered a few yards of her gold-and-snuff-coloured gown together, and leaned towards James with a sort of elephantine archness. "Now, your Majesty, you must kiss your bride good-night and come away." She advanced a massive elbow towards his ribs. "Another time I shall not have to be so strict, but we must not offend the godly by defrauding the pastors of their rights."

"No, no," said James hastily.

"But your room is not so far along the corridor as all that," rumbled the Queen-Mother archly.

James shot a nervous glance at Anna, who seemed entirely indifferent to her mother's suggestions. It was James who stammered and flushed, murmuring something about being fatigued after the long journey.

"We'll soon put that right, your Majesty," said the

Queen-Mother kindly. "If there's one thing better than the air of Denmark for restoring a man to his usual vigour, it's our spiced wines. Yes indeed, set your mind at rest about that." She nodded several times and patted him reassuringly on the shoulder, till James winced under the strokes of her great hand. "Come along then, kiss her and let us all get to bed in peace. No man will think the worse of you for seeking a respite from further exertion after such a journey as you've had. That's it, eh?" She nodded at him benignly.

James felt that he could endure no more of the conversation. He stepped across the room and stood beside Anna, uncertainly, with his hands loose at his sides. She waited there, between the candles, entirely grown up and composed, in her Court gown and pearl-sewn headdress, so encased in formality that at fourteen she seemed older than himself.

"Good-night," said James.

She lifted her head then and repeated the words after him, with an experimental air, and a sudden smile that showed James for the first time something of the girl in the miniature. With an impulsive gesture of compassion he took her face between his hands and tilted it gently back before stooping to kiss first one cheek and then the other, very gently, as if her helpless dependence on his wishes frightened him.

"I will be good to you, Anna," he said earnestly. "You need not be afraid." All his own memories of fear and loneliness went into that assurance, and Anna, who knew nothing of either, was amazed to see tears in his eyes.

But the Queen-Mother had a bawdy, business-like mind in which there was no room for imaginative vapourings. She looked on marriage with the detachment of a stock-breeder, and, since there seemed nothing definite to be

gained from the interview, she intervened to hurry James away to bed, offering him on the threshold of his own chamber a flagon of spiced wine which could be warranted to fit him for the fatigues of the marriage-bed if he had a mind to set about the business at once.

But James shook his head, contrived at last to shut the Queen-Mother out of his chamber, and stood with his back against the door for fear she might force an entrance even yet. Romance he had known, even passion, in the instant of that first meeting, but the business-like alacrity of the Danish methods tended to turn the stomach of a man who fancied himself a poet.

On her way to bed the Queen-Mother pursed her lips and frowned. She herself would have preferred the marriage to be consummated without further delay, if only because it might be possible to retire diplomatically from marriage by proxy should she obtain unofficial indications that her daughter's prospective husband was not qualified for his office, while it would be very much more difficult to disentangle a marriage made in James's proper person. Well, there it was. She only hoped that James's squeamishness had no sinister origin, but after all, she had done what she could. Short of putting the young couple to bed together, which seemliness forbade, she could do no more. If only the young man had been able to take a hint, everybody would have been in the happy position of knowing where they were, so to speak, next morning. As it was, they must take the risk. Even she could hardly bring herself to speak to any of the Scottish nobles of her apprehensions at the sight of the slight, scholarly young King of Scotland, with his shadowed eyes and unhappy, mobile mouth. It might provoke an international situation. Cities in the past had been sacked for less. Sophia of Mecklenburg, daughter, sister and wife of hard-drinking, loud-swearing, straight-

hitting warriors, lay awake half the night wondering if she had made a particularly gross blunder in the choice of a husband for her younger daughter.

But the progress of the affair did something to relieve her mind. James and Anna were married by the Scottish chaplain on the Sunday following his impetuous arrival. The service was in French, so that both bride and bridegroom could make the responses required of them, and the wedding night went off convincingly enough to take a weight from the Queen-Mother's mind. Anna accepted the relationship philosophically, for she was aware of a woman's duty in such matters. Besides, not even Helga Ingerstrom could now deny that she was Queen of Scotland. The Scottish noblemen, grim-faced men much occupied in wrangles over matters of precedence, called her "Majesty," and even her mother was too busy over the questions of the return to Copenhagen to scold her with her usual persistence. So James, going about in a state of slight intoxication due in part to the success of his adventure and in part to the unexpected strength of the local ale, believed himself to be completely happy.

He had too little experience to be dissatisfied by his wife's acceptance of his violent, uncertain love-making, and she had a number of pretty little coaxing ways which delighted him, who had never in his life been coaxed or wheedled before. Anna flung her arms round his neck in front of the assembled Court when he solemnly presented her on Monday morning with the palaces and domains of Dunfermline and Falkland (the customary dowry of Scottish Queens) as a morrowing gift. She practised little speeches in English for him before her mirror, though for the most part they and the rest of the Court continued to speak French. She acquired a habit of slipping her hand into his when they stood side by side, and James squared his shoulders and spoke

gruffly to hide his pleasure under a man's composure. The games of kissing and cushion-throwing which they played in Anna's rooms while the gale held them weather-bound at Upslo pleased him more, because games and laughter were such novelties, than all the noise and singing of the banquets which lasted half the night. At the first opportunity, after the toasts and responses had gone round, he would push back his chair and slip away, while Scots and Danes, united in appreciation of one of humanity's perennial jokes, winked and grinned over the rims of their refilled tankards.

So time passed happily in the pine-panelled rooms of the remote little township, while the winter gales whipped the sea to such heights that it soon became evident that there could be no return to Scotland before the spring. James did not care. He did not care, in his present mood, if he never saw Scotland again, provided he could keep his new Queen beside him. He called her Anne, explaining, with his lips moving across her breast, that Anna was too hard a name for such a gentle creature as his mouse, his dearest heart.

Anna smiled in the darkness.

"Why do you smile?"

"How do you know that I smile?"

"I can feel your cheek move. Tell me why you smiled?"

"Why?" Anna wriggled luxuriously in the darkness and the movement stirred James tumultuously. He flung himself across her, as if hoping through possession of her body to discover her mind's last secret.

"Tell me—tell me—tell me——"

"But what?" asked Anna, who had quite genuinely forgotten his sudden question.

"I *will* know," said James between his teeth. His grip on her was now that of an enemy rather than a lover. She gave a strangled little cry and on that instant, as on

the evening of their first meeting, his mood changed, this time to a shuddering compunction in which he was afraid even to touch her. He lay with his head on his arms, and his body shaken with slow, difficult sobs.

Anna, utterly bewildered, put out a hand and patted his shoulder. "There, there," she said, "you did not hurt me as much as all that. It is over now."

James turned blindly towards her, reaching up for her arm and pulling it round his shoulders. He was still shaken with compunction and a sort of terror of himself. "Anne, Anne, for pity, you must understand. I have been so long alone. I want to know every thought, every movement of your mind as I know every tremor of your body. You must understand, understand and save me——"

"Of course," said Anna, stifling a yawn against the smooth curve of her arm. Men were strange, but her mother always said that a wife must listen to her husband as well as lie with him if she were to do her duty. So she listened, understanding only a little of the imploring confession which James was pouring out between convulsions of nervous shuddering which seemed, she thought, likely to jerk apart his very bones.

"You must save me, Anne," said James. "Only you can do it. It has been so dark and so cold and I have been afraid, afraid all my life. Let me come close to you, close enough to warm my heart——"

"I do not see how you could be any closer than you are," said Anna, biting back a giggle.

But James dared not let himself be checked. "No, no," he whispered urgently, "I am speaking of your mind. I must know it and all it contains, if it is to companion mine. We must have no secrets. I will tell you everything, everything. I will show you my thoughts, my dreams. We shall discover new continents, new worlds of love together. They will make ballads about us and



our happiness, we shall live nearer to each other than ever lovers have been in all the golden love tales of the world——” He was gaining confidence and comfort as he spoke on. Anna patted his shoulder gently, thankful that his trembling had ceased, hoping that presently he would tire himself out and let them both get to sleep. “I will be with you wherever you go, so that there will never be loneliness for us. You will be so much more to me than a wife. You will be Anne, not Anna. I give you a new name because you will be a new creature that only I shall know. I will have you crowned as Anne, my Queen. That will please you, will it not, my heart, my little love?”

“Perhaps,” said Anna warily. “But I think I shall always be Anna to myself.”

“That will not matter. I know you. You are Anne.”

“*Do* you know me, James?” murmured Anna.

“Every curve and hollow, every inch. . . .”

“Perhaps that is not me,” said Anna drowsily.

It was December before messengers came in answer to the Queen-Mother’s despatches to say that all arrangements had been made for their reception in the capital, and an escort would conduct them by the difficult mountain route which took them through Swedish territory. Permission to traverse Sweden was grudgingly granted by the King of Sweden, a disgruntled person whose daughter of marriageable age had not been approved by the King of Scotland, and James insisted on setting out first, to insure a safe passage for his bride, testing the condition of the road, the horses and the sledges with such punctilious care that even the Queen-Mother, who had known the country and its weather for sixty years, was impressed by the autocratic zeal of her son-in-law. She was on the whole pleased with everything. The storms seemed to have blown themselves out,

the immense blue winter sky arched over crisped and scintillating snow walls, between which the thud of horses' hoofs and the fussily sweet chiming of their bells echoed along the frozen track. Anna and her mother sat together in a specially fine sleigh, with the Maids of Honour following in less gaudy ones behind, and the courtiers on horseback. This gave the Queen-Mother daily opportunities of questioning her daughter intimately upon the progress of matrimony, and assuring her that she had got a much better husband than she deserved.

So Anna was almost as relieved as James when at last, after some really considerable hardships, they reached the Sound and glimpsed the royal castle of Cronenburg jutting indomitably into the furious, ice-burdened sea. For three days they were kept from crossing by a storm which, the Danes said, must have been raised by enchantment. They apologised, and promised that the witches concerned should all be burned for it as soon as they could be found. James was interested in the theory, and gave his opinion that if the Danish witches had a hand in it they had been incited by the Scottish members of that infernal secret sisterhood. On his return he would examine the position and have the Scottish witches concerned punished also.

Meanwhile, as if at the threat, the winds died, and the party crossed to the castle in safety. There James was greeted with dignity and composure by Anna's young brother Christiern, who, unlike James in his younger days, obviously enjoyed being a king, and did the honours with the sumptuous airs of a child with a particularly well-equipped nursery.

James was amazed as he contrasted the cheerful comfort of the Court at Cronenburg with his own bleak childhood, for Christiern IV was a sturdy, pompous small boy who had a whole family, as well as an obedient Household to order about, and everybody, from the formidable Queen-

Mother to his young brother, Ulric, Duke of Holstein, seemed to enjoy themselves in the big, richly-furnished rooms behind the great walls which vibrated to the shock of the waves.

Here James and Anna were married a third time, with Lutheran rites, and the festivities were so sumptuous and so prolonged that he and the royal children were thankful for the occasional unoccupied hours which they could spend informally together in the semi-privacy of the great withdrawing chamber, where the Duke of Holstein's toys and games were kept.

"So they let you sail from Scotland?" said young Christiern, lounging across to the fireplace one idle afternoon. "You are lucky. They're fearfully strict with *me*." But his cheerful grin indicated that the strictness did not specially disturb him.

"I didn't wait for the Council's permission," said James. "I went without."

"Did you really? That was a good idea. I'll remember it," said Christiern, looking at his brother-in-law with new respect, as one who had more in him than might at first be supposed. "And you had to journey for days over the mountains, hadn't you, to find my sister?"

"Yes. I didn't mind. It was better than sitting at home signing papers."

"Much better. Don't I know! So you met at Upslo. But it is a poor little place. It must have been horrid."

"A beautiful place," said James.

"Well, I will make it a better one. I will build a city there, and call it Christiania, after me."

"You might at least call it Annaburg, after me," retorted his sister from the window seat where she was using the last of the daylight for matching silks.

"Certainly not. I am the King. You are only a Princess."

"Princess, indeed! I am a Queen now, quite as good as you."

"Bah, Queens are nothing. They have to do what Kings tell them."

"No they haven't. They do what they like."

"They don't."

"They do."

"James will put you in prison if you talk like that."

"I'd like to see him try. This is Denmark, not Scotland."

"Then *I'll* put you in prison instead."

"You can't. Because James won't let you. So there." And the Queen of Scotland put her tongue out at the King of Denmark just as the servants opened the great doors for the Council of Regency to file solemnly in behind the Chancellor for presentation to their royal guest.

James, who had been laughing at the argument and sprawling in his comfortable chair by the fire, hastily composed himself for a ceremonial audience, while young Christiern changed effortlessly from a rude little boy to a grave-faced young monarch bowing to his Council.

"Your Majesty," he turned to James, "allow me to present these lords and members of the Council. My lord Rosencrantz, my lord Guildenstern. . . ." James listened to ceremonious speeches, and made appropriate replies with a most novel lightheartedness. For though there was plenty of ceremony at the Danish Court, there was also so much fun between whiles, and so many secret jokes between Christiern and Anna, so much cheerful teasing of the young Ulric, and friendly companionship with the two other lovers, Elizabeth, Anna's elder sister and princess royal, and the Duke of Brunswick whom she was to marry in the spring, that James had for the first

time in his life the sensation of being one of a family, admitted to their confederacy on equal terms.

He was too happy to pay much attention to the disturbances among his escort, though the Chancellor Maitland did his best to enlist James's sympathy against the Earl Marshal, who considered that his lineage gave him precedence over the less distinguished Chancellor, in spite of the importance of that office.

And he did not even notice the acute hostility between one of the least distinguished of his gentlemen and one of Anna's Maids of Honour though Helga Ingerstrom's dislike of Walter Haliburton, the young Laird of the Holms, was one of the Court's best jokes during the winter the Scottish party spent in Denmark.

Walter continued to remain imperturbable, which merely seemed to goad Helga Ingerstrom to prick him more often with some barbed taunt which would raise a roar of laughter. From Walter it seldom produced a retort or any sign of having heard beyond a faint flush which would travel up from his throat towards the line of his cropped hair, which was as fair as ever, even now that he was a tall man of more than thirty. After the colour had faded his broad, good-natured face would be perhaps a little whiter than before, and a tension in the line of his jaw sometimes indicated that he had clenched his teeth. But Helga never had the satisfaction of knowing that she had made him lose his temper, for the tolerant smile still remained, though somewhat stiffened, as he rose and walked out of the room.

If she spoke to him civilly he answered, gravely and slowly, so that she could not resist the temptation to make fun of him again. And so it went on, while bets began to be laid on the chances of Walter finally losing his temper and giving Helga the good spanking she deserved.

But spring came, and James and Anna, who had stayed to celebrate the marriage of Elizabeth to her gay young Duke of Brunswick, finally decided that they must at last face the voyage to Scotland. As the date of departure came near, Helga and all the other ladies-in-waiting were kept too busy and scolded too often by the Queen-Mother to have time or spirit for the baiting of obstinate Scotsmen. So Walter enjoyed a respite which seemed to leave him as unmoved as the teasing had done. He also had other things to occupy him, for he was to some extent in James's confidence and listened to his problems when he took his turn in attending the King.

For James had a new nightmare, these days. Now that he was returning to his habitual responsibilities in Scotland after the first real holiday of his life, he had become obsessed with the poverty and emptiness of his Scottish palaces, which were so different from the homely comfort of Cronenburg, where it was impossible, in company with Anna, Christiern and the irrepressible Ulric, to take life very hard.

But in Scotland it would be different. He remembered the noisy Kirk, the quarrelsome nobles, the east winds which swept under the doors and sent the smoke swirling from the big fireplaces where the flames had been thriftily damped down with green wood. What would Anne think of it all? Would she be happy? Could he persuade the Council to allow enough money to prevent her Scottish Coronation from being a parsimonious shadow of her Danish marriage? The question worried him a good deal; so that observant young Ulric twitted him in private for having tired of his sister already.

James tossed a cushion abstractedly at Ulric, but continued to worry. The Provost and citizens of Edinburgh would be responsible for the decorations of the grey old capital. They would probably not fail him, if

only the ministers of the Kirk could be persuaded to leave well alone. James frowned as he thought of the ministers. If they interfered, he would see that they were sorry for it. Slightings offered to his own person were one thing, and he was accustomed to them, but a slight offered to Anne was a different and an intolerable thought. And the Council had an uncommonly aggravating habit of economising with the national funds.

But at least, as Chancellor Maitland pointed out, it did no good to anticipate such difficulties. The King should give his directions for the splendour he required, without assuming that there was any possibility of such commands being questioned. It was good enough advice. James wrote careful letters to the deputies who had been left in charge during his absence, commanding preparations for a tremendous reception, with salutes of guns, arras-hung streets, assembled lords and ladies, banquets, gold chains, fine horses with gold-embroidered saddle cloths. He pictured it all, a little wistfully, as it appeared in his imagination, gorgeous as something out of the pages of Sir Thomas Mallory whose *Morte D'Arthur* had once been sent to him by his godmother as a birthday gift. The reality seemed likely to fall sadly below these splendours, but he scribbled in furious hope, breaking off now and then to chew the end of his quill and look anxiously at Anne, who was on hands and knees on the bearskin rug, busy over a complicated game with Ulric and his Italian puppets.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IT WAS SUNDAY the 17th of May, 1590. Since morning the sky had been cloudless, though the sun had sucked up an opalescent haze from the marshes round the Nor' Loch, so that the cruel rock with its crown of towers seemed to ride, baseless, on the surrounding air. The city of Edinburgh was once more on holiday: the tapestries were out on the house-fronts and crowds had given up the peaceful hours of the Sabbath afternoon to stand about the approaches to Holyrood in the hope of catching a glimpse of the gorgeous ceremonial which was to take place in the Abbey Kirk.

Inside the Abbey of Holyrood the old banners with their rusty stains swung a little as the noble families who had been invited to the service took their places below them. Shafts of sunlight picked up the blaze of jewels or shimmer of satin and struck gleams from gold, silver and steel. On either side of the chancel waited an empty throne, each backed by the royal arms and the cloth of state. The congregation waited expectantly, shifting on stools and benches for a better view of the preparations, listening to the cheers of the people outside as they greeted the better-known arrivals.

At last a steady roar announced the first procession, and the trumpeters who led it sounded a long blast in the sunshine outside. The King's guard followed them, their pikes laid side by side, blade to butt, in front of them as they pushed back the excited crowd. Other trumpeters followed, gorgeous in crimson, and behind them wound the procession of the Knights of the House-



hold, the barons, the magistrates of Edinburgh and the principal cities of Scotland, the councillors and senators, the heralds of Marchmont, Albany, Rothesay, Islay, Snowdon and Ross, in their tabards, gorgeous with the royal rampant lion on the ground of gold; the pursuivants of Carrick, Unicorn, Dingwall, Bute, Ormonde and Kintyre. Last of all came the Lord Lyon King of Arms marching alone in his crown and collar in front of the great officers of state.

The crowd pushed excitedly against the pikes which held them back, lifting their children up for a glimpse of the Sword of State which went by in the hands of the Earl of Angus, the Sceptre borne by Lord Hamilton, and the King's Crown carried by the flushed and worried young Chamberlain of Scotland, Ludovic, Duke of Lennox.

Then came James, his face awed at the emotion with which the excited ranks greeted him, his head bare, and his purple robe borne clear of the early summer's dust by four crimson-coated pages strutting happily through this momentous occasion and superbly indifferent to the indecent excitement of the lesser folk behind the straining pikes.

The procession entered the Abbey, the Lord Lyon King of Arms, with his heralds and pursuivants, returned to escort the Queen from the Palace, and James took his seat on the throne to the right of the table behind which the officiating clergy waited in their Geneva gowns.

From this point of vantage he looked warily round the packed church. As far as he could tell things were going smoothly enough. The nobility might have their quarrels in spite of him, but at least they had all turned out to see his Queen crowned. And the ministers, though they looked sour enough, had consented to the unction when ordered point-blank to do so. And so they should: if his Anne wished to be anointed as Queen of Scotland, who were the

ministers to declare such unction papistical? But perhaps he had been wise to postpone the formal entry into the city till Tuesday, so that they could not accuse him of Sabbath-breaking besides. He was so anxious for the Coronation to be a success that he was willing to give way to them a little, for they were never averse, these preaching fellows, from a public scene, and he wished above all to avoid that, with all the Danish nobles present. After they had returned home, and Anne was safely crowned, well, that was another matter.

He turned to look at Master Robert Bruce, chief minister of Edinburgh, whose expression was scarcely encouraging. Did the man mean mischief? But a commotion in the doorway distracted his attention. The Queen's procession had arrived. James rose to greet her, and all over the Abbey, with little stirrings and creakings and the jangle and clash of swords against stone, the congregation rose with him.

First came the Lord Lyon King of Arms, bearing, as was his ancient right, the sacred oil, and followed by his attendant heralds and pursuivants, behind him John Maitland, the Chancellor, created Lord Thirlestane that very morning, carrying the Queen's Crown. Behind him the English and Danish Ambassadors surrounded the slight figure of the Queen, and behind her paced the Countess of Mar, who led the great glittering train of ladies of rank, chosen from all Scotland and Denmark.

Anne was dressed in white, except for the purple velvet robe with its white lining which flowed back, gold braided, from her shoulders to the pages in orange and white (the new Queen's colours), who carried it. She held her head high and looked neither to right nor left as she walked slowly towards the waiting throne. Her hands were clasped before her, and she wore only the rings given her by James. Her face, below the white headdress,

was flushed with excitement, and James felt his heart constrict as he tried to make her see his reassuring smile across the shadowy church. But Anne did not turn her head. She lifted her gown carefully clear of the steps and composedly took her place in front of the whole congregation. The ladies grouped themselves round her, the congregation, following James's example, sat.

Mr. Galloway, the king's chaplain, preached from the Forty-Fifth Psalm, and with a certain pointedness, unfortunately lost upon Anne, who did not understand enough Scots to grasp of the special meaning with which Mr. Galloway declaimed the tenth verse.

"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people and thy father's house.

"So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; worship thou him."

And James, listening impassively to the oration, one fist supporting his chin, reflected that the detective ability of the Kirk was as good as ever. They had not lost much time in finding out that his Anne had a weakness for the decorative but discarded Popish rites.

The ceremony proceeded. The Duke of Lennox and the Lord Hamilton, contrasting in their brilliant velvets with the two sombre officiating ministers, crossed the Chancel and knelt before the King.

"Is it by your Majesty's wish that we now proceed to crown the Queen?" demanded Master Bruce.

"It is," said James.

Mr. Bruce turned to the congregation. "I am directed by his Majesty to crown the Queen," he declared, as custom was. Then, with the corners of his mouth turned down, he took the flagon of oil from the Lord Lyon and plodded across the Chancel to the Queen's side, averting his eyes while the Countess of Mar undid the neck of Anne's gown and exposed her white throat. James felt

himself stiffen with apprehension. It would be just like that fanatical preacher to have an attack of scruples at the last minute and dash the flagon to fragments on the Chancel steps in the name of the Lord of Hosts and of the Reformed Kirk.

But Mr. Bruce contented himself with turning again towards the silent, craning congregation and solemnly explaining that he obeyed the command of the King in the matter. Then, with the same air of disgust, he tilted the flagon so that the oil ran over Anne's right hand, added a few drops on her forehead, and with a certain malice, directed a good deal more than was required into the hollow of her neck. Anne bore it meekly, with her hands crossed on her breast, and the Countess of Mar hastily interposed a square of fine lawn to check the streaming oil, while Master Bruce pursed his thin lips and again averted his eyes.

The Duke of Lennox, the Lord Hamilton, and the Chancellor set the crown on Anne's head, bared by the Countess of Mar for its reception. Across the church James watched the ceremony, smiling at the grandeur with which his small love bore up the weight of her crown. Then he handed the sceptre to Master Bruce, who duly put it into Anne's outstretched hand, with the solemn words of the ceremonial:

"We, by authority of the King's Majesty, with the consent of his Estates, representing the whole body of his country, place this crown on your Majesty's head; and we deliver this sceptre to your Highness, acknowledging you to be our sovereign queen and lady, to whom we promise all points of office and obedience, dutiful in those things that concern the glory of God, the comfort of the Kirk, and the preservation of his Majesty; and we crave from your Majesty the confession of the faith and religion we profess."

Anne rose, as had been agreed, since her command of the language was still uncertain, and held the little copy of the Scots Bible high in her right hand in token of agreement as the minister went on to repeat the oath on her behalf.

Mr. Bruce's voice was grumpy, for he had no opinion of the integrity of women, especially foreigners, and suspected that Anne knew enough Scots to have repeated the oath herself had she sincerely intended to be bound by it. So his eyes were fixed sternly on her small, calm face as he declared:

"I, Anne, queen of Scotland, profess, and before God and his angels, wholly promise that, during the whole course of my life, so far as I can, I shall sincerely worship that same eternal God according to his will revealed in the Holy Scriptures. That I shall withstand and despise all papistical superstitions——" Mr. Bruce fairly spat out the words, "ceremonies and rites, contrary to the word of God, and procure peace to the Kirk of God within this kingdom. So God, the Father of all mercies, have mercy upon me."

The Lord Lyon raised his hand. "God save the Queen," he cried.

"God save the Queen," crashed back the fierce response. The silver notes of the trumpets carried the acclamation out to the waiting crowds, who took up the shout with a sound like waves breaking below a cliff.

The Coronation was complete; but before the congregation was set free they must listen to an oration from Master Andrew Melville, that redoubtable champion of the rights of the Kirk, who had composed two hundred Latin verses for the occasion, and duly recited them all. Afterwards came an address from Master Bruce, and the oath of homage which the nobility offered on their knees to the Queen. Anne, erect as ever, but ready to faint with

fatigue, watched them pass before her in a blur; good old men with grizzled beards and tears on their cheeks at the happy sight of a king and queen ruling over the distressed country in amity again; younger, fiercer men who glared boldly at her, red-headed Highlanders, saturnine lairds from the Border lands, bony men like Vikings from the flat acres of Fife. One tall boy in particular caught her attention, for he stumbled as he came up to the Chancel steps because his eyes were on her face and not on the stool which stood in his way.

His fresh, smooth skin was flushed with chagrin under its healthy weathering as he knelt, and she could not keep back a flitting little smile of sympathy at his embarrassment. As he passed on she half-turned towards the Countess at her elbow, and asked, under cover of the changing line of nobles:

“Who—was—that?”

The Countess of Mar looked coldly down at her new mistress from her own gaunt height. So the Queen could speak the language when she liked, it seemed. “The young Earl of Moray, so please your Majesty,” she whispered harshly back.

In the pulpit Master Galloway rose at long last to pronounce the blessing which set them free from the protracted ceremonial. Stepping from his throne James gave his hand to his Queen and led her, in state robes and crown, down the dim church between the silent ranks of his greatest subjects. The trumpets sounded, the Lord Chancellor ushered them towards the doorway, and as they passed through the sunshine and the shouting of the people assaulted them together.

The rest of that day, and the days which followed, were taken up with celebrations which kept the candles flaring in the great reception rooms at Holyrood until the colder light of morning beat them down. The Palace

was crowded with important strangers: half the Household were turned out of their rooms and told to find beds in the city so that the visiting Danish noblemen might be lodged on the premises, an arrangement which pleased Walter, since it gave him a chance of going home as soon as his duties permitted and bringing his father and mother a lively report of all that was going on at the Palace, of the comic blunders of the grave and stately Danes who were not yet used to Scottish ways and exceedingly apt to take offence, of the youth and gaiety of the Queen, who could gambol any of the Scottish ladies to a standstill, and plagued every one to teach her a different dance each night. He spoke of the pride and happiness of the King, who did not dance himself, but sat smiling as his darling moved in a scintillating circle of young courtiers, pouting round her fan at the unsmiling Duke of Lennox, laughing over her shoulder at the young Earl of Moray as she pretended to listen with attention to the instructions which the Earl of Huntly was giving her in an intricate new step.

But he said nothing of the mockery of Mistress Helga Ingerstrom, Maid of Honour, who, since she came to Scotland, seemed to find it necessary to redouble her little pin-prick attacks upon him, if only to show that her arrival in a foreign country could do nothing to daunt her spirit. Walter avoided her conscientiously as he went about his affairs, and when the accidents of serving at the Queen's table or fetching and carrying for the King brought them for an instant together, Walter would bow and retire, with his face grave and his ears scarlet, while the derisive giggles of the other Maids greeted Helga Ingerstrom's latest gibe.

Gradually Walter began to avoid the audience chambers and withdrawing rooms in which he might encounter her

as much as his duties allowed. Sometimes he would take refuge in the Garderobe where, in the stuffy, familiar smell of hot irons and singeing cloth his old master, the Clerk, sweltered and grumbled through a heat-wave in early June with the accounts for the Coronation spread out round him.

On such occasions he greeted Walter with acclamation. "Here, lad, here, for pity's sake. You were the best cipherer that ever I had. Have a look at these figures which I must send in the Exchequer by the end of the month. For now that things are so tightened up, a man might lose his place on a matter of a few ells of taffety unaccounted for."

"Tuts, surely not," said Walter, bestriding a bench, and drawing the great ledger with its tottering columns of scratchy figures towards him.

"Aye, but it's so," protested the old man, muttering and mopping, as he thumbed through an untidy sheaf of bills. "There was such a fardel of stuff to order, that I got fair dumfounded. What with the pages and the trumpeters and the lackeys after the velvet for their belts and the satin for their breeks, and the green and white velvet wanted by the tapissiers to cover old cushions like new, and the gold and silver for fringes, forty-four hanks, no less at three pund six and eightpence Scots the hank, and velvet at fifteen pund the ell and the very yellow crepe for cloak linings costing thirty shillings the ell, no less. Eh, the expense of it all fair goes to a man's heart. All that good money that would be enough to keep a man in his old age poured out like water for an afternoon's spectacle. Eh, dear, eh, dear . . ." he shook his head with a tragic expression, as he flipped the fistful of bills again with an inky finger.

Walter picked up a quill. "Maybe so, but it brings us no nearer to balancing the accounts to sit and shake our



heads over them. Read me out the items and I'll check them up on the page."

"Aye, I'll do that. Here's twenty-four ells red satin to be four doublets and four pair of breeks for the trumpeters. . . ."

"Correct," said Walter, his forefinger on the entry.

"At seven pounds the ell," sighed the Clerk. "Mercy, seven pounds to cover the bottoms of these great loons with the tin whistles. Man, it's enough to bring down the wrath of the Lord."

"I doubt it," grinned Walter. "What's next?"

"Twelve ells broad English scarlet cloth to be four cloaks at seven pound ten. . . ."

"Correct."

"Four velvet belts. . . . four pounds ten."

"Yes. Next."

"Four pairs of woven shanks . . . sixteen pounds. Tch, tch."

Walter chuckled. "Cheer up, man. It's not your money."

"Eh, but I feel it near as sair. Here's the count for the twenty-four gowns of blue cloth that was given to the twenty-four old men, according to the years of his Highness's age, with twenty-four purses and twenty-four shillings for each——"

"You'll not grudge them that, surely," said Walter, whirling over pages in search of the entry.

"Well, mebbe not, but here's the hire of the feather beds for all the Danes that came with her Majesty, fifteen of them at two shillings the night, with coal and candle for the chambers——"

"You'll have a weight off your mind when the Court moves to Falkland," said Walter cheerfully.

But the Court did not stay long at Falkland, for Anne was anxious to see her own palace of Dunfermline, that

superb and rambling heritage of the dispossessed monks, set in pleasant country near the bustling, pretty town. The Queen took a special fancy to the place, musty and damp-smelling as it was, for it was her own, and therefore infinitely more precious than all the gaunt castles where she was entertained by favour of the King. She had lost her dear familiar home; but here at least she might find a refuge, furnished after her own taste and fancy. She looked round the bare walls with appreciative eyes which did not miss the rusty tenterhooks and rotting tapestries, the cobweb-curtained panes of the narrow, leaded windows, but imagined also a gorgeously refurnished palace where she might live as she pleased, where even James came by her courtesy and not of his own right.

"And is it really mine?" she asked her husband, with that oblique smile which from his first glimpse of her miniature he had found impossible to resist.

"Yours utterly, dearest heart."

"I may pull down a wall here, throw open a window towards the sea——"

"You may stand the whole place on its chimneys in the earth, sweet, if it would give you pleasure. But now I want to present a true friend of mine, who has come on my instruction to meet you here." He turned and beckoned Sir James Melville forward from the doorway.

Sir James knelt. Anne extended her hand, disdainfully curved from the wrist in more of a command than an invitation to kiss her fingertips. Sir James was tall, with the air of a campaigner, but he was grizzled and moved stiffly because of the rheumatism which had come upon him lately, while his blue eyes looked at her a trifle too shrewdly for comfort.

"I have planned," said James, "to appoint Sir James, my love, as Master of your Household, to be counsellor

and guide through all the problems of setting up your estate in a strange land, when, as it may be, state affairs may keep me from you now and then."

"Oh," said Anne, piqued at this hint of governance, "I had not fancied myself in need of a keeper, sir."

"Madam," said Sir James temperately, "there is no such need. It is because of your great place in this kingdom that you must be well and humbly served. I am proud that his Majesty sets such a trust on me, and perhaps, when time has tried me, you may also find me true."

"Then we will await time's verdict, since you set more store by it than mine," snapped Anne. She turned her back on him and walked away towards the next room where her ladies-in-waiting were surveying the dusty walls with some distaste, their skirts gathered together for fear of mice and spiders. The King went after her, surprised and disconcerted by her lack of courtesy.

"Anne, Anne. . . ."

She paused unwillingly.

"Why did you speak so sharply to my good old friend?"

"Well, it made me angry, to have him brought up just when I had pictured the Palace and everything in it as mine. Here he is, sent to be my gaoler——"

"My love, he is to be your devoted servant——"

"To spy on me and watch everything I do——"

"Listen, Anne," said James. "You have come into this country as its Queen, but also as a stranger. I have too much on my hands to be with you always, and it is not suitable that you should go unprotected. Sir James Melville will see that you are not defrauded, he will check the duties of your servants, he will stand between you and the dangers of your great position as I would stand myself. That is all. You are still as free as the birds in the eaves——"

"He will not meddle in what does not concern him?"

"Nothing concerns him but your welfare," said James.

"Then I will bear with him," declared Anne more graciously. She had inherited enough of her mother's sense to realise that she might indeed be outrageously cheated by the Scottish dealers from whom she must buy furnishing for the entire renovation of her new home. The advice of an experienced man would certainly be useful. She allowed herself to smile.

"So while I am away——" began James.

"Where are you going?" There was more curiosity than regret in her tone.

"To attend to the trial of the witches who did their best to drown us, sweetheart," said James.

Anne made a grimace. "These poor old women again! Why not leave them alone, since we are safe? They tortured so many at Cronenburg that their screams kept me awake. You could have them cautioned and sent home."

James shook his head. "The Kirk is clamouring against them. 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,' you know."

"But you are the King," said Anne. "Surely your wishes are more important than those of the Kirk?"

"In this case they are the same," said James, adding dryly, "and such a remarkable state of affairs must be taken advantage of at once, since it is unlikely to last long."

"You mean that you want them all hunted out and killed?" asked Anne curiously. Here was something in James's nature, an unexpected, implacable streak which contrasted oddly with the sensitive, diffident creature she already knew. In her business-like way she was already exploring it, wondering whether it might perhaps threaten her own power over him later on.

James thought for perhaps half a minute before he answered her question, twirling a tassel on her dress. "Well," he said at last, "yes, on the whole I do, although

I hold that a man—or a woman for that matter—is the best keeper of his own conscience. But in all this kingdom neither the Kirk nor the lords agree with me, since such a notion would take half their authority and give it to the creatures that they rule. And I myself know—how shall I put it to you—that when this matter of witchcraft goes too far it leads the ignorant not only into damnable perjury of their own souls, but into treason against the State. And the safety of the State is in my keeping.”

“But surely you don’t believe,” said Anne, just above a whisper, “that these witches can *do* the things they claim? Raising the Devil, I mean, and curing disease? Mother always said it was the greatest nonsense.”

“I don’t know,” said James thoughtfully. “It is a dark business, but it interests me. I must know more of it before I judge the devil’s power over these creatures. Concerning disease, in this world where there is so much, it would seem better cured, no matter by what means, and we would be ungrateful indeed if we burned the physicians afterwards. But as for the Devil, that is another matter. You see——” he was talking more to himself now than to her, “when the Devil expressly directs a mob of half-crazed men and women to risk body and soul in order to destroy the Queen of Scotland (not to mention the King into the bargain) then I begin to fancy that the Devil may have more interest in the matter than one would expect of the Author of Evil, with all the kingdoms of the earth and the hinterland of Hell to dominate.”

“You mean——” said Anne, large-eyed, “that I have an *enemy* in Scotland?”

“I mean,” said James, “that it would not surprise me to find my crazy young cousin, Francis Bothwell, at the back of this. And since I must leave you while I look into the matter, do you now see why I have chosen you a Master of your Household whom I can entirely trust?”

"I hope I did not speak too rudely to him," whimpered Anne.

"It will not take you long to make amends once I am gone."

"James, *do* not go!" There was more urgency in his wife's tone than he had ever heard, and she had backed nervously against the rough and crumbling wall. "I'm—afraid."

But James put his hands behind him, obstinately, wrong-headedly denying himself the pleasure of yielding to her, as he beckoned to Sir James Melville who waited outside. He was not often to have such a chance again.

In Edinburgh the witch-trials were the sensation of the moment, for rumour had magnified the activities of the witches into a monstrous conspiracy from which neither a man's life nor his soul were safe. Crowds collected outside the courthouse, and the prisoners had to be surrounded by a strongly armed guard to save them from being torn to pieces by their countrymen without the formality of a trial.

The Devil's advocates, the little huddle of prisoners, made a poor show for the honour of Hell, with their tears and protests of innocence. There was Gelie Duncan, the serving maid, who had worked a few cures and played a reel on the jew's-harp while the coven of witches capered in the storm round North Berwick kirkyard. There was Dr. Fian, the schoolmaster, Barbara Napier, the wife of a citizen of Edinburgh, who stumbled into the Tolbooth beside Euphyam M'Calyean, a lady of rank, whose father had been a judge of the Court of Session. Behind them Agnes Sampson, called "the wise wife of Keith," walked composedly, offering encouragement to Robert Grierson, the wizard, who wept with fear at her heels.

Their preliminary examination, under threat of torture, produced a strange jumble of rubbish; christened cats,

black toads, midnight dances, black men rattling knuckle-bones, Channel crossings in sieves, waxen images of the King: "ordained to be consumed at the instance of a nobleman, Francis Earl of Bothwell."

The final item caused a sensation beyond description. James himself refused to credit it since it had been extorted by fear, but he summoned the leader of the witches, Agnes Sampson, to be brought to Holyroodhouse so that he himself might question her dispassionately.

In due course Agnes Sampson appeared and stood before the King in the small gallery he had chosen for the interview, as being comparatively private. She was a middle-aged woman, neat, plump and modest, her grey hair parted in the middle beneath a starched white cap, and her face brick-red from exposure to the winds of Fife. She curtsied to the King, and then waited his pleasure, her hands folded meekly across her apron.

James looked at her in astonishment. "But you are not a witch?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Agnes Sampson pleasantly.

"What?"

"I can do a many things with the help of my spirit," said the old woman proudly. The judges grouped behind James stirred and murmured, nodding their heads. But James leaned forward. "You cannot know what you are saying. These men here" he jerked his thumb backwards, "are listening to all you say and afterwards they will take you back to prison. Come now, I want to hear no more of witches——"

"I cannot help that, sir," said Agnes Sampson, placidly smoothing her apron, "since you ordered me to speak the truth. I am the chief of all the witches in our coven and no matter what Gelie Duncan says she takes her orders from me, and Effie M'Calyean likewise."

James threw her a look of horror, glancing up at the

table, at the far end of which a clerk, his legs twisted round the supports of his high stool, was scribbling busily. "You see that man?" James warned her.

"Why, yes, sir, and kind it is of him to write down everything I say. For surely I will tell you nothing but the truth."

James made one more effort to save her. "On the contrary," he said, "I am sure you are a great liar. Now then, out with it, is the whole thing not an invention to bring your name before the world?"

Agnes Sampson looked shocked. "Indeed, sir, I would not like you to think so little of me. I have great powers, thanks to my spirit, and if you do not believe, perhaps I can convince you, if you will come over beside the window, for what I will tell you of your private affairs is not fit for the ears of these gentlemen, learned and kind as they are." She dropped an apologetic curtsy towards the ominous circle of her judges.

"Do not go with her, your Highness," whispered one of them. "She might suddenly stab at you. Or——"

But James had risen. "She has been searched, and has no weapon. I will certainly go with her."

They walked together across the room, and in the window embrasure Agnes Sampson turned to him, her pale blue eyes strange and fixed. She laid her finger tips on his arm and began to speak in a strained voice, as if she were repeating, with an effort, words which came to her faintly, from far away:

*"I will tell you everything, everything. . . . We shall discover new continents, new worlds of love together. They will make ballads about us and our happiness. . . . We shall live nearer to each other than ever lovers have been. . . . You will be so much more to me than a wife. You will be Anne, not Anna. I give you a new name because you will be a new*



*creature that only I shall know. . . . I will have you crowned as Anne, my Queen——”*

“Stop,” shouted James. He turned back to the table, shaking.

Agnes Sampson trotted after him, smiling and triumphant. “So you see, sir, I have powers, have I not, since I repeated the very words which you said to the Queen on your wedding night. I could tell you more——”

“Yes,” said James hoarsely. He sat huddled in his chair, his head between his hands. “Yes, yes, yes, you spoke only the truth.”

“And so perhaps she spoke only the truth on greater matters,” murmured one of the men of law at his elbow. “What of the Earl of Bothewll?”

“He must answer his charge himself,” groaned James. “This is a terrible thing. There is more in it than the ravings of a few poor women.”

“I am glad we have been able to convince your Majesty of that,” said the man of the law with a certain gusto.

“How much more,” said James, half to himself, “I cannot tell. The Devil works strangely, it seems, and can bribe the souls out of men’s bodies with the offer of knowledge as well as the kingdoms of the world and their glory.” He turned abruptly to the old woman. “What words, then, do you use to conjure up this spirit? Is there a secret spell?”

The wise wife shook her head. “No, sir, nothing like that. It is all quite simple. He has taught me to call ‘Holla, master,’ and that brings him without fail.”

“M—m,” said James, twisting his moustache. “And then he answers your questions?”

“Yes, and those of other people. My lord of Bothwell, now, he wished to know how long you, the King, should reign, and what should happen after your death.”

"And what did your spirit answer?" demanded James, startled.

"My spirit," said Agnes Sampson placidly, "promised to make away with the Queen for him, but afterwards he used words I could not understand to explain why it was not in his power to harm you."

"What words? Can you remember the sound of them?"

The wise-wife puckered her brows. "*Il—est—homme—de—Dieu,*" she said slowly.

"He is a man of God," the avid group behind the King's chair translated as one man.

"A curious testimonial," said James dryly. "Tell me more."

Nothing, it seemed, would please the old woman better. She described the orgies in the kirkyard with a wealth of detail, and a fanatical ardour which would have suggested to a later age that she stood in more need of a physician than a judge. She contrived to implicate all her companions afresh, with the best of intentions, and had Gelie Duncan summoned from her cell to repeat her fine performance on the jew's-harp for the King's admiration. When at last James dismissed her it was with the faggots positively kindling round her feet that she was led, still respectful and complacent, back to await her trial.

Francis Hepburn did not wait to be summoned. He came to Court as soon as he heard of Agnes Sampson's confession in a fine and not unconvincing rage and swaggered about, his sword continually half out of his scabbard as he confronted various noblemen whom he accused of looking at him askance. He demanded the utmost publicity at the trial, and announced himself content to abide by the decisions of the judges, who could not fail to discover the malice and falsehood of the plot against him. He demanded to see James, and was refused, and failing in this did his best to discover what his

cousin's attitude really was by buttonholing the first Gentleman of the Chamber whom he encountered on the stairs, who happened to be Walter, escaping as usual from the laughter of Helga Ingerstrom.

Walter had always admired the swashbuckling young Bothwell who reminded him of Willy, that almost forgotten apprentice who had so dazzled him as a schoolboy. Something in the reckless egotism of the ambitious had a fascination for him still, perhaps because it was so different from his own simple and downright character. At all events, he was flattered by Bothwell's attention, and allowed himself to be led out by a side door into the autumnal gardens of Holyrood, where the seed pods of the flowers planted for the Coronation rattled in the searching winds that swept round Arthur's Seat.

They walked briskly up and down the bleak alleys, where, as Bothwell said, no sneaking lackey could overhear their talk, as he questioned Walter on what the King thought of the witchcraft charge against him, whether he had spoken of any proof, and why he had refused to grant an audience. But Walter could tell him very little. The King had been looking grave, lately, he admitted. Yes, he had given audience to the judges in charge of the case. Yes, he believed he had even spoken to the chief prisoners. There were all sorts of rumours. Every one at Court had some new tale, and most, Walter admitted apologetically, believed my lord of Bothwell to be the Devil's advocate, if not the Devil himself.

"God blast their souls," said Bothwell, with a ferocious gesture, which almost alarmed Walter into sharing the general impression. "Then I had better make myself scarce."

But it was too late. The gardens of Holyrood might be safe from inquisitive ears, but from the many windows they had been observed ever since they set out, and such

was the state of hysterical apprehension caused by the affair that the Captain of the Guard instructed an armed escort to meet them on their return.

Bothwell, who resisted arrest and cut several men-at-arms about before they could wrench his sword away from him, was warded in the Castle, and Walter, who had put up his fists in an instinctive, bewildered attempt at self-defence, was removed to custody in the guard-room of the Palace pending the King's decision.

The Great Hall at supper that night was tumultuous with excitement. Lords and ladies of the Court screamed assertions and counter-assertions at each other across the narrow tables, unchecked by the presence of Royalty, for the Queen had come up from Dunfermline to shop in Edinburgh and the King was taking supper with her in their private apartments.

"They are searching the city with swords——"

"Bothwell has been taken to the Castle because he bears the Devil's mark——"

"He is the Devil himself. He has cloven feet, and struck six men dead when they took him."

"He has turned the Queen into a leveret and the King into a toad——"

"He has jumped into a smoking crack which opened before him as they dragged him up the Canon-gate——"

And so it went on. Rumour surged round young Bothwell like the smoke of the Pit, as it had once surged round his uncle, the elder Bothwell who had kidnapped Mary the Queen. Helga Ingerstrom, laughing at the wild talk, suddenly grew grave. She had heard another name mentioned. "What's that you said?" she called across the table.

The man who had spoken cupped his hands and leaned towards her. "I said that things would be dull for you

now, Mistress Ingerstrom, since they've taken young Walter the Silent into ward."

"*What?*" Helga Ingerstrom half rose.

A neighbour chimed in. "Oh, yes. I saw it all. He was hatching treason with Bothwell in the garden after dinner and they clapped hands on them both."

"What did they—do with him?" asked Helga Ingerstrom in a thread of a voice which hardly carried through the surrounding hubbub.

"Put him in the guard-room, of course, till he can stand his trial to-morrow. The penalty for sorcery is death, you know. Like treason. They say the King's red wud against Bothwell and it's not likely to go easy with his friends."

"So they talk of treason," some one commented. "Well, Bothwell's tainted enough with that. So this other fellow——"

"Oh, *he'll* be brought in on the witchcraft charge, I should say," wheezed an elderly and purple-faced lord who was sitting opposite making bread-pellets and flicking them at the prettiest girls within range. "They're surer of a conviction that way, and they're all out to make an example that'll put such practices out of favour. Pity, of course. He's too good-looking a lad to be twisted by the torture."

"Torture——" Helga Ingerstrom's voice was shrill.

"Oh, yes, they always torture them," the informant said placidly. "To make them confess, you know. They can't burn them unless they confess, and unless they burn plenty of witches and wizards the Kirk accuse the judges of not doing their duty. They've got some shrewd ways of persuading them, too," he went on, still rolling dingy pellets between his pudgy hands. "There's the pilliwinks, now, that's thumbscrews, which makes most people speak. And there's the boot, that turns a fine straight

leg into a bloody pulp. But perhaps the rope is the worst, for they draw it tight and then saw it to and fro round a man's neck, till he's half-strangled——”

Helga Ingerstrom's stool went over with a crash, and her informant stopped rolling his pellets for an instant as he watched her hurl herself towards the door. “Dear me, how very strange,” he mumbled to his next door neighbour. “Now, as to this torture of the rope, here is the way of it. . . .”

The lackeys on duty in the corridor with the second course turned curiously to watch the young woman fly past them, speculating variously and coarsely as to the cause of her haste. But once away from the main thoroughfare from the kitchens the corridors were deserted, since every one was either serving or sitting at the first supper below. Helga ran straight for the royal chambers, intent on securing a word with the Queen.

The ante-room was empty; though the fire still glowed on the wide hearth. Helga rushed on. On the far side of the reception chamber sat the Mistress of the Maids, busy over her embroidery, a hatchet-faced woman with whom Helga had recently had words. She pursed her lips now at Helga's headlong arrival.

“And where do you expect to go, at that speed, and this time of night, may I ask?”

“I must see the Queen,” gasped Helga. “And at once.”

“Indeed? May one ask why?”

“No, no, but it is urgent, too urgent to stand here talking. I must see her, I tell you. It is—it is a matter of life and death.”

“It would be a matter for hanging if I were to let you see the Queen now,” retorted the Mistress of the Maids with an air of satisfaction. “Her Majesty has retired—and his Majesty is with her,” she added with emphasis.

Helga made a quick movement to get past. "I will knock on the door——"

"You will do nothing of the sort." The elder woman alertly barred the way.

"If you hinder me you will regret it——"

"And *you* will regret it, let me tell you, if you take that tone with me."

"Oh—I—I *beg* you——"

"Am I to summon the guard to take you from this door? Or will you go?"

"Once more, will you not let me in? For the sake of a man's life——"

"So there's a *man* in it. H'm," the elder woman sniffed, the censorious, smug sniff of a bitter, jealous woman who held her post grimly in the face of the young and lovely creatures who were so anxious to oust her from it. She had suffered a good deal from Mistress Ingerstrom's mockery: here was a heaven-sent opportunity of paying off old scores. "So, it's a *man*, is it? I might have known, you little slut. *Oh . . .*"

The sound of the ringing slap could be heard all across the room. With her hand to her cheek the Mistress of the Maids confronted her subordinate. "Now you've done for yourself," she said viciously. "You'll be packing your coffers to return home to-morrow. I shall show these marks to her Majesty."

"I'll—go," said Helga Ingerstrom slowly. She turned away, her head down, her whole body drooping, her arm across her eyes to hide the lighting of a new idea which had come to her at the mention of the guard. As she reached the door she contrived a realistically heart-broken sob.

From the far side of the room the Mistress of the Maids surveyed her, arms folded, thin lips a mere line across her face and one cheek flaming from the impact of

Helga's palm. Helga went meekly out, closing the heavy door softly behind her. Then, still more softly, she drew the heavy bolt.

But once outside her whole bearing changed. She shot across to the casement, noiselessly opened it, peered out. They were only one flight up: below lay the dark and desolate gardens: in front of the casement stood a heavy chest containing linen for the royal bedchambers. She lifted the lid, found it full to the brim, and tiptoed to the outside door. The passage was empty. She knew the way to the guard-room in the barracks wing. Picking up her skirts Helga ran wildly along the draughty corridors, stumbling down flights of steps, meeting, by Heaven's mercy, nobody at all. As she reached the neighbourhood of the guard-room she paused to get her breath and smooth her hair, then went on at a stately pace.

"Hullo," said a tall soldier. "Who comes here?"

"I have a message from his Majesty."

"And how am I to know that?" laughed the soldier.

Helga stamped her foot with impatience and something like despair. The man was ogling her, his hands on his hips, his eyes admiring. He was obviously the worse for drink. Desperately she cast about for some means of convincing him, then, as she hesitated, one of his companions spoke from the shadows.

"Best go slow, Mac, that is one of the Queen's own ladies. Her message is likely enough. What is it, madam?"

"An urgent summons," said Helga, curbing her wild hope. "His Majesty is in his private chamber, and wishes to question the prisoner who was taken with my lord Bothwell this afternoon."

"Indeed, and why should he do that?" asked the first soldier. "At this time of night, too."

"Don't argue with her, man. Did he not question the



witch, Sampson, the other day? Take the message to the Captain for safety's sake. You know what the King's like when he's crossed."

"Oh, all right. But why don't you take it yourself, since you're so careful?"

"Because I'm off duty, that's why. And if you've forgotten what the Captain said last week over a message that wasn't delivered, well, stay where you are, that's all, and don't grumble at the consequences. It's nothing to do with me."

"It's a pity that his Majesty can't question his prisoners at a reasonable time of day," grumbled the first soldier. But he slouched off along the passage, and presently Helga heard the clash of arms, the groan of a key in a lock, rough commands, and the tramp of returning feet. Along the passage towards her came Walter, between two soldiers. She stared at him blankly, checking his exclamation of astonishment with a cold look of disdain.

"Lead on, lady," growled the soldier she had seen first. "We'll follow you."

Helga turned on her heel and walked back the way she had come, her ears strained for the sound of the following footsteps, her eyes searching fearfully ahead for some wandering official who might question the oddly-assorted party. But the corridors were as empty as before. In the distance she could hear the shouts from the Hall where the first service of supper seemed still to be in progress. But at any moment, she knew, the Lord Chamberlain might give the signal to rise and the whole assembly would pour out into the corridors.

It seemed as if the soldiers were walking slower with every step; as if the corridor itself stretched like something in a nightmare as they went along it. Yet she dared not hurry. She forced herself to swing her skirts, even to hum a little tune.

At last she paused outside the ante-room door. What if the Mistress of the Maids had discovered herself shut in and raised the alarm? But no, she was on duty for another two hours. She'd still be sitting there, smug over her embroidery.

Helga opened the door. The ante-room lay quiet. The fire still glowed. From the casement she had left ajar came a dank breath of the night air. She turned to the guards.

"Wait for your prisoner outside," she ordered. And to Walter: "His Majesty will see you in the inner room."

Walter hesitated, then lurched forward as one of the soldiers gave him a push. Helga closed the door and shot the bolt safely behind them both, then leaned against it, suddenly faint.

Walter stooped over her, his face bewildered and concerned. To Helga it seemed to grow enormous and then diminish to the size of a pea. The room seemed to swing and tilt. She must not faint, she must not. . . .

When she came back to her senses she was lying on the floor, with her head on his shoulder and his face close to hers. She had no idea how long she had been unconscious. There could be no time to lose. She wrenched herself free and scrambled to her feet. "We must hurry—hurry——" she whispered. "The window—there are sheets in the chest. Oh, be quick. They will try you for treason—torture you—unless you can escape. So I came——"

"You—came for—me?" Walter was standing stock-still, his hands idle, looking dazed.

Helga pushed him aside, dragged a couple of sheets from the chest and hastily knotted their corners.

"But—why?" demanded Walter. "I should have thought——"

"Who cares," hissed Helga, knotting furiously, "what you think? It is a question of your safety——"

"But—why?" demanded Walter again.

Helga bundled the knotted sheets into his arms. "Fix these to the centre post of the casement and stop croaking at me like a frog in the marshes," she ordered. "Make haste, man, for pity's sake make haste. I cannot hope to keep them outside much longer."

Walter abandoned argument and deftly did what he was told. Then he turned, with one leg astride the sill. "But you——" he began.

"Never mind about me." Helga fairly danced with excitement. "Go, *go*. I will put it right—the Queen—take care of yourself—and——"

Walter dropped his lips quickly on to one of the hands which pushed at him, then, with his hands on the make-shift rope and his toes scrabbling at the rough stone, he began to slide down the wall.

His head had barely disappeared when the guards in the corridor, disconcerted by the sounds from within, began to pound furiously on the door.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

HELGA LEANED FAR out of the window, nervously watching the knots on her improvised cord and imploring Walter to make haste. A falsetto rapping on the inner door was punctuated by refined, indignant shrieks, and the tremendous tattoo from the guards outside seemed likely to bring half the Household on the scene. And indeed all along the corridor heads were poked out of bedchambers where servants were preparing their masters' quarters for the night, and groups of people on their way from the dining hall had stopped to wonder at the commotion outside the royal apartments.

Walter reached the ground, wasted a precious instant in waving up to the window where Helga was wildly gesticulating towards an unfrequented angle of the Palace wall, then disappeared into the drizzling darkness of the autumn night. Helga waited, her fingers in her ears, turning from one door to the other as if unable to decide which of the two indignant parties she preferred to face. At last she tiptoed across the room, withdrew first the bolt from the inner door then that from the outer one, and returned to a point midway between them, assuming a belated air of innocent surprise.

Unaware that their way now lay clear, those on the far sides of both doors continued to pound and to demand entrance.

"Open the door, girl," screamed the Mistress of the Maids.

"Open it yourself," said Helga in a lull.

On the same instant the latches of the inner and the

outer door were furiously shaken, with the result that those behind them catapulted into the ante-room and rushed at Helga. She awaited them demurely. The casement was closed: the knotted sheets bundled into the coffer below it. Everything seemed in order.

"Why was this door barred?" screamed the Mistress of the Maids, shaking the girl by one arm.

"*Barred?*" said Helga.

"Where is the prisoner?" roared the guards, taking her by the other.

Helga, released on the one side, swung limply round to face the angry soldiers. "But how should I know that?" she said blandly.

"What is this you've been up to?" rasped the Mistress of the Maids, swinging her back again.

"What is the matter here?" said the King from the inner doorway.

Hastily the group dissolved, the guards stood at attention, the women curtsied and drew back with sideways looks of fury and amusement. James, comfortably informal in an old furred robe over plain cloth doublet and hose, strolled out, with the Queen close behind him. "What's all the hullabaloo? Is the Palace on fire?"

"That woman, your Majesty——" blurted the taller of the guards.

"Then the prisoner is not with you, sir?" demanded the other.

"What prisoner, my man?" inquired James.

"The young man taken with my lord of Bothwell——"

"We were told by this woman to bring him here at once in order that he might be questioned by your Majesty——"

"I have seen no prisoner," said James. "Why should I wish to interview prisoners at this unconscionable time of night? Upon my soul, you fellows expect your rulers

to work harder than your craftsmen. A nice idea. Who told you I was going to see this prisoner?"

"*She* did, your Majesty," said both men at once.

James turned towards Helga with interest. "Did you now? And why, I wonder?"

Helga hesitated for an instant, then spoke impulsively. "Your Majesty, they took him for no fault but bad company. He was with my lord of Bothwell in the garden this afternoon. I saw them myself from an upper window. But I am certain that they were up to no harm. I was watching his face and it was as stupid as ever. Walter Haliburton would not——"

"Walter? Young Haliburton of the Holms? No," said James, "he is no plotter. He cannot even plot my escape by the postern, when the most long-winded of my noblemen are waiting in the ante-chamber, without giving me away by his grins. Who says he has been plotting?"

"Your guard, sir. They took Bothwell, and Walter with him. Walter was sent to the Palace guard-room, to be tried also . . . and they said in the Hall that they would torture him . . . and I . . . could not bear to think . . . of that. . . ."

"Go on," nodded James.

"So I went to the guard-room and ordered the soldiers in your name to bring the prisoner here to be questioned. And I told them to wait outside till the prisoner returned. And . . . and . . ." Helga glanced apprehensively round the oddly-assorted, intently-listening circle, "and then I . . . opened the window and . . . barred the doors and made him climb out——"

"Over a twenty-foot drop?" said James, who seemed to be more interested in the merits of the story than in the rights and wrongs of the escapade. "Well, I suppose a broken leg is better than one pulped in the boot. But still——"

"No, no, I made him a rope to break the fall. Out of the linen in the coffer——"

"The best sheets that were new for her Majesty's arrival! You hussy!" exclaimed the Mistress of the Maids. She scuttled across the room, threw back the lid of the coffer and held up the improvised rope with an expression of unspeakable horror. The guards glared straight before them, Helga resigned herself to disgrace, comforted by the knowledge that by this time Walter was in all probability safe in his father's house in the Lawnmarket.

The only sounds in the silence were the outraged little clucking protests made by the Mistress of the Maids as she wrenched in vain at the knots which had been strained tight. James turned to look at the Queen, who was biting her lip as she stood, with her arm through his, surveying the culprit. The sight of her face destroyed the last hope of gravity. James burst suddenly into a roar of laughter. The glum-faced guards started and the Mistress of the Maids dropped the sheets, watching in rigid disapproval while James led Anne, giggling helplessly, to a chair, and then sat down himself to beat his knees and lean over them in a soundless paroxysm which left him gasping.

"I do not know why——" he said shakily. "But it tickles me to think of those fellows gravely guarding them from interruption while they helped themselves to our finest sheets for want of a rope-ladder." He doubled up again at the sight of the expression on the face of the Mistress of the Maids. "Well, well, Mistress Ogilvy, they are not cloth of gold, and that's something."

"Does your Majesty wish that I should give the alarm and have the grounds searched?" said the first soldier.

"Grounds searched? Certainly not," said James, still chuckling. "For one thing, unless he's more of a fool than I take even Walter to be, he'll be long since over the wall and gone to ground in the farthest wynd at the back of

the High Street. No, I will not have him pursued. And what is more, I will write him a free pardon. How will that suit you, Mistress?"

"Oh, *sir*. . . ." Helga's stiff taffeta skirts crackled as she swept them out in a deep curtsy. Her mouth was quivering.

"Now, now," said James kindly. "No tears. You men may return to the guard-room. I will give you a note to the captain which explains that the prisoner is released by my pleasure. Give it him and keep your mouths shut, or the trick played on you will go round the Court. Now, where's pen and paper?"

Helga hurried in search of them, while the Mistress of the Maids padded resentfully after the Queen with her arms full of the ruined sheets.

"And what does your Majesty suggest shall be done with these? The finest linen, too, which must have cost a pretty penny, and twisted up like rags. Tch, tch! That girl was always a wild one, your Majesty——"

Anne patted back a pretty little yawn. "But her husband will soon keep her in order," she said. "Don't you wish you had such a romance?"

The Mistress of the Maids drew herself up and pursed her lips together. "I was thinking only of the destruction of so much good linen, your Majesty."

"I wonder," said Anne, as she paused in the ante-room door. "Well, keep it just as it is. It shall be part of my personal gift to young Haliburton's bride."

But its presentation had to be delayed, for Andrew Haliburton, who put no faith in princes, had arranged for Walter to set sail that very night for Antwerp before the house in the Lawnmarket should be searched. So Walter's pardon reached his home too late and was critically surveyed by his father, who thumbed the parchment as if it had been a piece of stuff of doubtful value.



No, no, it should never be said he doubted the King's own word, but mistakes were made now and then, with the best will in the world. He would keep the paper and thank you. In private he afterwards told his wife that he had heard many a story of a man brought home by fair promises to find a rope waiting for his neck, and Walter had better bide in Antwerp till the year was out; especially now that Joseph seemed to have lost his grip on affairs, which was not to be wondered at with him on the kirk-yard side of his eightieth birthday.

The Court was to keep Christmas at the Palace of Holyrood, for though the Queen would have preferred Dunfermline, the repairs were not yet complete. It was to be a merry Christmas. James was happy and proud of his Queen, who made the grey old Palace a gayer place, with her continual call for lights and fires and masques and music. James had not noticed the lack of these things, but when Anne demanded extra comforts it was hard to think why he should have done without them for so long. The Court seemed full of young people, and old men were now in the minority, for Anne's young courtiers made so much noise that their elders tended to retire in dudgeon to their estates and shake their heads over the establishment of a modern Babylon in Holyroodhouse.

But at first James liked it. He was feeling secure and happy, and though he did not play much part in the revels, and was only a moderate drinker, he liked to sit in his chair by the great hearth and watch the pretty rabble of the Queen and her Maids, some Danish like Helga, and others, like the lovely Ruthven sisters, Beatrice and Barbara, daughters of the Scottish nobility. They skimmed about in their brilliant, whispering silks, playing games, decorating the long rooms, after the Scandinavian fashion, with armfuls of evergreens.

James smiled as he watched them, moving to and fro in the figures of some scampering or stately dance, while the fiddlers sawed at their instruments and the servants mulled great bowls of ale with spices to flavour it, and lemons, specially imported for the occasion, bobbing up and down against the rims.

On Christmas Eve the Earl of Moray came south from the Highlands to his castle of Donibristle, near Edinburgh, to present gifts and the compliments of the season at Holyrood. Anne received him herself, and most graciously. Oh, but he must stay, she said, flushing and glinting up at him. She and the King would not hear of him riding away to spend Christmas alone in his gaunt old castle. No, they couldn't spare him. Did they not want all the gayest company at Holyrood to make them forget the dreary Scottish weather which had sent them rain and fog for Christmas instead of the snow and sunshine they would be having at home in Denmark? Not to mention the kill-joys of the Kirk, who called Christmas celebrations popish and shook their heads over even her innocent decorations. He must certainly stay. He must, he must. . . .

The tall young Earl of Moray smiled and murmured something about his mother expecting him back.

"Your *mother*?" cried Anne. "Leave her to her memories. We shall soon be old, too. Let us make sure of our fun first. He must stay, mustn't he, James?"

James nodded, his eyes fixed on her face. His lips were resolutely stretched to the same smile, and his foot still swung in time to the music which set the dancers jigging to and fro in a reel, but his lids were lowered to hide the unbelieving, unwilling suspicion which had newly darkened his eyes, and he held out his hands to the pine logs as if he were strangely cold.

The Earl of Moray crooked his arm and led the

Queen on to the floor. "You'll stay?" she was asking him.

"If *you* wish me to," said the Earl of Moray.

To and fro jigged the dancers, and to and fro jigged their shadows on the wall, monstrous and misshapen, ten times life size, like the shadows which began to flicker in James's heart.

But he made no sign of having noticed anything, and no alteration in his way of life. His mornings were devoted to state affairs with his Council, and in the afternoons he rode out to hunt as usual with a fine retinue and came back to eat a hearty supper. Afterwards he would sit with a mug of spiced ale, watching the shadows thrown on the old stones by the masqued figures in the revels organised by the Queen. He saw many things besides, some of which he was not intended to see. But no one knew that he had seen them, for his old habit of secrecy had come to his aid now. They were small things in themselves, of as little importance as drops of water in a bucket; but like the single drops of water falling on a man's head in the Eastern torture, they had power to unsettle the reason at last.

From his corner by the hearth James saw the Queen run laughing into the young Earl of Moray's arms away from the odd man out who was chasing his companions with a blown bladder on a stick. He saw the Earl lay his cheek lingeringly against her hand instead of brushing it, casually, with his lips. He saw him kneel to fasten the Queen's shoe, and, leaning a little forward, caught also the look she gave him as he knelt at her feet. He saw, and said nothing, but something seemed to be happening, against his will, inside him, something which congealed love into the lust of possession, and his customary appreciation of the good looks of the young Earl into an emotion he had only experienced once before,

as a mere passing spasm, long ago, when Esmé Stuart had casually smiled at some one else while he, James, watched him unaware.

But now jealousy took him utterly, tormenting him during the long black nights till he sweated and cried out, imposing such a strain on his self-control that sometimes at a banquet he would feel ready to faint. His only satisfaction at that time was in his power to keep his knowledge secret.

Round him danced and sang the unconcerned Court, and as he watched, torturing himself with continual glimpses of the two he knew now to be lovers in thought, if nothing more, he reminded himself continually that a meaner creature would have blurted out his rage and ruined his cause. Now at last, he was thankful for the bitter lonely childhood which had taught him to see so much and say nothing, to hide under that loose mask of buffoonery the emotions which another man would have worn bare-faced.

He, James, was the King, and the king must not raise his hand against one of his subjects in revenge. But he was a man, as well as a king, a husband cuckolded in his own house by a man he had befriended and honoured, as son-in-law to his mother's half-brother, the Good Regent Moray, and this was how he was served, as all men served their benefactors, as all curs turned on the hand that fed, and snakes on the breast that warmed them. So James thought of it; swung suddenly from sunny, intimate companionship in his fools' paradise to the frozen solitude of his old familiar hell, he dwelt continually on revenge, as if the furious warmth of rage which pulsed through him as he planned could melt the frozen despair which now encased his heart.

Anne was no more than a child, he told himself in a forlorn attempt to save at least some of his illusions.

She had been beglamoured, and she would soon forget. He, her husband would help her forget . . . to forget. He would save her from this folly: it was his duty, as her husband. But she must not guess, she was not wise enough to understand why it was expedient that her lover must die to save the Queen's good name. He would be careful, careful. No one should know that his hand had guided the instrument he chose. It only remained to choose that instrument. Yes, there was the crux of the problem; whom should he choose to work out his vengeance? James passed a pale tongue over his lower lip and rose stiffly from the great chair in his private room where papers were kept. They would be dancing in the Hall by now: perhaps the sight of them would stimulate his inertia, give him an idea.

Anne was standing in the midst of a laughing group round the great fireplace, and in that hour of owl-light, before the servants went round with tapers to touch the candles into cool points of flame, the glow from the logs flickered ruddily over silks and satins and lace, picking out the jewels in a high-piled head of hair, the sheen of a bare arm, the arch of a slim-shod foot. The women round her were talking and laughing, glancing over their shoulders at the courtiers who were coming in, by twos and threes, perfumed and lazy after the stinging rain they had ridden through on the hunt.

James, standing back in the shadows of the thick velvet curtain which hung across the doorway to the private apartments, watched the pretty little devices of the Maids of Honour as they tried to attract partners to their sides before the dance began.

"If I were a man," said one, "I should hunt less if it made me so stupid afterwards."

James strolled slowly forward, as half a dozen laughing girls chimed in. Then a clear voice—Beatrice Ruthven's—

rose alone, speaking mischievously to the Queen. "Tell me, your Majesty, who is the finest man at Court, these days?"

"The finest man?" countered Anne, as she watched the far doorway through which the courtiers were still sauntering. "What do you mean by that?"

"The bravest——" said one.

"No, the gayest——"

"The most handsome——"

"And," Beatrice added in a sly undertone, "the nearest to your heart."

"The Earl of Moray, of course," said Anne. "He is far and away the finest man at Court."

"Indeed, my love?" James spoke suddenly from the shadows, "not even excepting me?"

A shudder went over the inconsequent group. James, watching only Anne, saw that she had turned almost as white as the wood ash on the hearthstone, and her bare arms were pricked with gooseflesh. Since when had she been so afraid of him? Since her passion for young Moray made her fear his discovery of it? Then he must seem to be still ignorant, to have spoken by chance, to be reassured by her ready answer, and the curtsy which lightened bitter comment and defensive reply into gestures of ceremonial badinage.

"I had thought," she smiled reproachfully, "that your Majesty knew himself above all such comparisons."

"Dear heart," he said smoothly, "I never doubted it." He bent stiffly over his wife's cold hand, while round the fire-lit circle went a little shimmer of relief, and from the servants' entrance came lackeys with tapers and musicians with their instruments to chase away shadows and whispers, with the crisis which had been averted for the time.

James waited. He must be more patient; that outburst

had nearly given him away. He schooled himself to be patient, to seem jocular and harmless, and to wait. But he did not have to wait long. Young Bothwell, warded in the Castle, early in October, had escaped soon afterwards, spirited out of his prison, according to current rumour, by the witches who served him, but more probably by the more prosaic expedient of a consideration for his gaoler. His escape had not been unwelcome news: it saved the embarrassing business of bringing a powerful lord to trial for his life, and the danger of provoking his followers to reprisals. The Kirk, too, were lukewarm in their condemnation. Like his uncle before him, young Bothwell had always been loud in his protestations for the Reformed religion, and much might be forgiven a young man who was prepared to champion the cause of the Kirk even against the King.

So Bothwell had been allowed to immerse himself in his Border stronghold of the Hermitage, and spend December among the bogs and braes of Liddesdale, while he interviewed the local gentry, who were whole-hearted, hot-headed allies, and took council with various people who had reason to share his resentment, among them the ex-diplomat, Gray.

In their company he drank confusion to the King, and planned a madcap attempt to capture James in person. How much more was projected no one outside his immediate circle knew. There was wild talk in the Liddesdale stronghold, where only the curlews could hear it, of compelling the King to abdicate, even of setting Bothwell on the throne of Scotland. But any such project must, Bothwell's friends pointed out, be carried out quickly before the Queen should bear a child, for with the arrival of an heir apparent there must be an end to Bothwell's rather far-fetched claims. So the little army left Liddesdale on Christmas Eve, and two days after Christmas

were taking stock of their prospects outside Edinburgh.

Francis Bothwell, that crazy but attractive young man, had friends even at Court, among them the Earl of Moray. Somehow, he and his men reached Holyrood. By some means or other they actually gained an entrance in the small hours, and once in the Palace they made directly for the royal apartments, the doors of which had been hastily barred, as Helga Ingerstrom had barred them a few months before, but this time against a noisy mob of cut-throat Borderers who promptly prepared to burn them down.

The royal guard put up a bewildered defence, outnumbered as they were and half asleep; but it was not till the frenzied peals of the common bell had roused the citizens of Edinburgh to their assistance that the raiders were caught in the rear and compelled to turn their attention from the doors they were breaking down to the citizens who were breaking their heads with whatever came to hand. Bothwell, sizing up the situation, recognised it as hopeless. If he were taken now the charge of treason would be added to that of witchcraft and his career ended by the executioner's axe. He was no coward, but he had the advantage of knowing when he was beaten. He gathered a few men together and cut his way out. Half an hour later he was riding furiously for the Border hills. Peace was restored to the muddy, littered corridors of Holyrood, the citizens were thanked and eventually persuaded to go home, and somewhere before daybreak everybody had time to think of going back to bed for a few hours of belated sleep.

But James remained awake. Such scenes as these always upset him, and he sat huddled in his furred chamber robe over the last embers of the fire, while Anne snored a little as she slept, curled up like a kitten in the middle of the big bed. James restored his disordered nerves with



aquae vitae and wondered why the Earl of Moray had not been seen after the raid, and also whether this incident might not prove useful after all. Moray was known to be on good terms with Bothwell: he had, with any luck, known of the attack. It would suit him very well to have something happen to the King. Moray would not take long to get rid of his own wife if there were a chance of marrying the Queen of Scotland. Strange, when kingship was such a thankless, arduous business, how many people took a fancy to it. He spread out his fingers to the faint warmth, and began to glow himself as the idea at the back of his mind took shape.

The next day the prisoners who had been captured from Bothwell's gang were hanged without further formality, and James began to consider what should be done about their leaders. He took his time, for he had that most unyouthful quality of being willing to wait till his plans ripened, where so many others would have snatched at them still green. He had an interview with the crafty and unpopular Chancellor Maitland whom he knew for Moray's enemy. Maitland thumbed his chin and did not see his way to taking an active part in bringing Moray to justice, but he reminded James that the Earl of Huntly would probably jump at the chance. Had not the late Regent Moray been the death of his father? James nodded. That was true. That was very true. He would remember the Earl of Huntly when the matter came before the Council. It must be gravely considered, for a murderous attack on the King touched the safety of the whole country.

So, in due course, a royal warrant for the arrest of Bothwell and his supporters, whoever they might be, was endorsed by King and Council, and James then put forward the name of the Earl of Huntly as a suitable person to execute it. The Councillors nodded, pleased

to find their own wishes for firm measures so unexpectedly matched by the peaceable James, who might so easily have let the matter slide. They nodded, too, over the choice of the young Earl of Huntly, who had one of the largest followings in the country and was, it seemed, anxious to prove that a Catholic might still be a loyal Scot. He was Lieutenant of the North, powerful and willing. No, the Council found nothing wrong with the suggestion. Huntly, with his Gordons, could execute the royal commission very nicely, and without calling any one else to help him, so that justice could be executed with gusto and the minimum of trouble and expense.

James left the Council with an expressionless face, and sent for the Earl of Huntly. He knew the Earl to be a man with the Highlander's tempestuous spirit and long memory for ancestral wrongs. In the usual way James considered this attitude both humourless and farcical, but for once it seemed likely to be useful instead. On the other hand, the harsh-faced young Earl of Huntly was no fool, and it was evident, during the first part of the conversation, that he was wondering why he in particular should have been chosen to pursue the rebellious Bothwell. But when James began to name Bothwell's allies, Huntly thought that he understood. He, too, had been at Holyrood, in close attendance on the King, over Christmas, and he had not missed much of the by-play which had set gossip linking the name of the Earl of Moray so flagrantly with that of the Queen. He had watched it with indignation, for there had never been any love lost between Moray's Stuarts and Huntly's Gordons since the Regent Moray had beheaded the father of the Earl of Huntly for venturing to consider himself a suitable husband for Mary Queen of Scots.

"You will, for instance, also arrest such notorious

supporters of the rebel Bothwell as—the Earl of Moray,” murmured James.

“I will, your Majesty.” Huntly’s reply rasped close on the King’s command.

“He is to be brought here—for trial,” added James. “And since—er—this weather will make the Border hills next to impassable—it might be as well to make sure of Moray *first*. He is likely to be still at his castle of Donibristle, which is but a short journey, but if you delay, he may consider himself safer in the north.”

“I will not delay, sir,” said Huntly grimly.

“Good. You understand your commission fully, I am sure.”

“I think so,” said the Earl of Huntly. “I am to arrest the Earl of Moray and bring him to you here. It is possible that he may resist——”

“Most possible,” agreed James.

“I might have to use violence. . . .”

“Use it,” said James, thin lipped.

“He is to be taken, dead or alive?”

“*Dead*—or alive,” James agreed.

“Should anything—er—unforeseen happen,” murmured the Earl of Huntly, “there will, of course, be an outcry. Moray has a certain cheap popularity,” the young man’s lips curled, “with the common people. Do you wish me, in such circumstances, to assume responsibility? It would scarcely be seemly for responsibility to be—laid elsewhere.”

“Should such an eventuality occur, it may be well worth your while to endure a little—er—temporary inconvenience till the—outcry should have died down,” said James.

“I am quite willing to do that, your Majesty, for a consideration.”

“A consideration?” said James.

"Yes. It would perhaps be a wise precaution to have your Majesty's instructions set down on paper to—refresh my memory."

"I see no reason to suppose," said James agreeably, "that your memory should fail you over the matter of the death of the Earl of Moray, a project known to be one you cherish."

"The *death* of the Earl of Moray," repeated Huntly with great emphasis. "Yes. I think we do understand each other, your Majesty."

"I think we do," said James. And his face was cruel as the grave.

The young Earl of Huntly bowed and backed himself out. In the corridor he could be heard calling for his servants, for horses, weapons and cloaks. In his private sanctum, surrounded by the iron-banded coffers containing the papers of state, James permitted himself to smile. The muscles of the hands which lay, palms downwards, on the table before him contracted gently, as a cat's do when it tests its claws.

To him, an hour later, came Sir James Melville, in a state of consternation, as he had once come before. Memory of that earlier occasion made James frown as he raised his head from the treatise on witchcraft on which he was making notes. "Your Majesty, may I speak?"

"I am busy, as you see, Sir James. Is anything wrong with her Majesty? You would hardly disturb me with so little ceremony for anything else?"

"Indeed I would not; but this is fully as urgent, sir; it concerns the State." Sir James was breathless with haste and distress. "I have met the Earl of Huntly below. He is collecting arms and men. He talks of setting out in pursuit of the Earl of Moray, and so——"

"And so?" inquired James coolly.

"And so I came to you, post-haste, knowing that you would stop him from this mad——"

"On the contrary," said James, "he has our full authority. He is Lieutenant of the North, and the obvious person to execute justice on—rebels." He sighed, and flicked the pages of the book before him, as if his forbearance were wearing thin.

"But, sir, sir," cried Sir James Melville, "you cannot know what you are doing. This Huntly is the sworn enemy of the house of Moray. Can you think that he will lose this opportunity? A murder now will set half the Highlands in arms against him, and the Government that sent him besides. Consider, sir, I implore you. Is it wise?"

"I think so," said James. "I should not like to feel, like you, Sir James, that my greatest subjects could not put national justice before minor matters of personal revenge."

"The Earl of Huntly is young, hot-headed and——"

"Listen," said James, raising his narrowed eyes again from his book and fixing them on his questioner with such an expression of dispassionate, calculated malevolence that Sir James positively took a step backwards, "I know what I am doing. My mind is made up and I will have no interference. Had I not known you for an honest man, and respected your judgment I would not have listened to you for an instant. I am astonished, Sir James, that you should come here with the suggestion that young Huntly will allow personal prejudice to interfere with his duty. In another man I should have concluded that malice prompted you——"

"Indeed, your Majesty——"

James held up his hand. "But of you I will not think so. I prefer to call it misdirected zeal. Go back to your charge, Sir James, and show just such zeal in the ordering of her

Majesty's household. How is the rebuilding getting on at Dunfermline?"

"It has been brought to a standstill by the wet weather, your Majesty," said Sir James, unwillingly. "But——"

"But I shall hope to inspect it myself before long," said James smoothly. "I wonder whether the English masons are worth the wages I have to pay them. What do you think yourself? Can I do better with local men at a lower price?"

"They are very skilled workmen, sir."

"Then they shall have their wages. There is nothing too good for the Queen, and nothing I would not do for her safety or—happiness, Sir James. You understand?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"Better not, perhaps, on the whole," murmured James, as he returned to his book. "How many men have ruined their projects because they found it necessary to explain that they were not such fools as they seemed? No, no, continue to think me a fool, Sir James, if it is any comfort to you. Now I can really spare you no more time. This matter of *incubus* and *succubus* is most engrossing. . . ."

So Huntly and his men set out, pell-mell, for their enemies' headquarters, and early in February they contrived to corner the Earl of Moray in Donibristle. They called on him to surrender: he refused. There was an angry parley and some random shots from the upper windows of the house killed one of Huntly's men. Here was a spark for tinder. In that instant the question became not one of capture but of annihilation. As night fell Huntly's Gordons went deliberately about the business of burning their enemies out, in the best tradition of Highland warfare. They piled heather and faggots, corn-ricks and piles of hay against the house, right to the very thatch. Then under cover of the dark-

ness they fired them, and as the roof began to blaze, their victim, at the head of his men, rushed desperately out.

Young Moray's right arm was burned nearly to the bone, his helmet plume was lit and streaming like a torch, but he hacked his way, left-handed, through the yelling mob that dragged him down, and rushed for the shore, where he might quench his wounds and perhaps find a boat to take him out of reach of his enemies. Huntly saw him go, and his vengeance with him. Leaving the crowd about the house he and a few of his men clashed after the reeling figure of Moray, who had dropped his sword to clutch his agonised right arm. They caught him on the edge of the dark water, across which the reflections of the blazing house wavered like dreadful flowers.

Huntly stabbed. Moray dropped, his beautiful face livid as he twisted it into a ghastly smile with a last piteous flicker of his old vanity. "Yes—Huntly——" he managed to rasp out between his sobbing breaths, "you have—spoiled—a better face—than—your own." He flung up an arm to wipe the blood from his eyes, sagged, and slid into the shallow water, where the dark spreading stain of his blood helped to extinguish the cascade of fiery sparks which the wind brought shorewards as the roof of his house fell in.

Huntly and his men rode hard for the safety of the north, while behind him an indignant tumult gathered. The body of the dead man was taken to Leith and exposed before the people, while Moray's mother walked in the procession which carried his bloody shirt as a banner and demanded justice from the King.

James was suitably appalled. Well aware of the way tongues would wag if given the chance, he produced a copy of the royal commission specifically commanding

Huntly to bring Bothwell, Moray and others, *alive*, to Edinburgh for trial. If Huntly had exceeded his office, then neither the King nor his Council could be blamed. The argument and the document were unanswerable. James promised that the culprit should be censured and an inquiry held. Meanwhile he removed Huntly from his office of Lieutenant, cancelled the royal commission which had empowered him to execute justice, and ordered him to consider himself under arrest. Moray's mother was sent away with sympathy and promises, and James listened attentively to the ministers of the Kirk who clamoured for a crusade of extermination against all Catholics, the Earl of Huntly above all.

But that he refused to allow. Huntly might now be an outlaw, since he had caused the death of another noble, but had not Bothwell committed as grave a crime in leading a murderous attack against the King? If the Kirk refused to take action against Bothwell at the command of the King, then he, the King, was most certainly not going to raise an army against Huntly to please the Kirk. These clan feuds were too common for so much notice to be taken of this one.

There the matter ended as far as James was concerned. He rose to declare the audience at an end and went softly to his private apartments, where he spent a quiet hour with his books before supper, and played a game of chess with the Chancellor Maitland, Lord Thirlestane, afterwards. The Chancellor made no reference to the undertaking by which, men already whispered, he and Huntly had privately arranged the death of various noblemen, Moray among them, before the Christmas raid had precipitated events. But he talked of retiring from Court for a while, since his health had not been good and he seemed to have been unfortunate enough to have offended the Queen.



He closed one eye in a cheerfully conspiratorial gesture as he allowed James to annex a pawn, and James, his fingers hovering over the board while he planned a decisive move, assured his valued adviser that he was welcome to a holiday, that no man had earned it more, but that, as for the Queen, he could rest assured that her Majesty's resentment would not last long. In fact, he proposed to have a word with her that night.

And afterwards his attention wandered from the matter in hand, so that the Chancellor soon had him involved in a complete checkmate. James shuffled the pieces together. "I do not like this game," he said. "Give me real men and women instead of those carved puppets which can feel neither triumph nor pain. I am going to bed."

Lord Thirlestane smiled as he put away the chessmen in their ivory box and watched James pad off, soft-footed, to the royal apartments. Yes, he had better retire from Court for a while, until this affair had blown over. Later perhaps . . . but there were many other ways of living than by wearing oneself thanklessly to the bone for the King. And James had changed a great deal of late. At the time of the marriage he had thought him pliable and easily led. Now, he was not so sure. He seemed harder, subtler, as if his easy, jocular buffoonery did not go as deep as most people thought.

James took his time over his preparations for bed, and when he came to the Queen's room he dismissed her ladies with a nod. Anne was sitting in a big chair in a white brocade nightgown trimmed with ermine and velvet. She was pale, and James fancied that she started at the sight of him. Her eyes were red-rimmed, with shadows under them, and she drooped as she rose from the chair. So it was true; she had loved that pretty young

man, and now she was afraid he would discover it. Well, he would let her off with a warning this time. She was young, ambitious too. He fancied she would learn.

"You don't look well," said James. "Why is that, I wonder?"

"I have—a headache," whispered Anne. Her eyes were wide as she stared at him coming across the room to her; and she backed away from his quiet approach.

"A headache? It must have been a bad one, if you could cry about it. Perhaps there was something—else?"

"No—no—nothing at all."

"*Nothing?* Well, well. Had you no tears then for the loss of such a loyal young courtier as the Earl of Moray? Surely that was unfeeling, Anne? I had thought better of you than that."

"I was sorry to hear of his—death," said Anne, dry lipped.

"Yes, yes, of course," said James deliberately. "But if you had heard his mother plead for revenge, and seen his poor torn shirt gouted with blood borne like a banner on a spear you would have been sorrier, I think." He was standing by the hearth, his hands spread out for warmth in a favourite gesture. "The very soldiers were snivelling at the sight. His mother had an old glove, too, which she held against her cheek, as if his hand were still within it——"

A small sound came from behind him. Anne had crumpled, face downwards across the gold-brocaded coverlet of the great bed and her sobs were shaking the very curtains over her head.

"Ah, yes, now that is more friendly," said James, looking over his shoulder. "I am sure that the Earl, if he could see you, would be flattered by such a display of feeling from—the Queen."

He rubbed his hands together. They were warm at last, and he turned from the hearth to cross the room towards the bed. "Yes, yes, that is feeling indeed. Almost as if your own husband lay dead. Almost, but perhaps not quite. . . . For he is here . . . waiting . . . to remind you . . ." at each pause he blew out a candle, till only one still stood on a table by the Queen's side, "to remind you that your duties remain."

Anne propped herself on her elbows and stared up at him, dry-eyed and shaken still with long, convulsive shudders. "I—don't know what you—mean," she managed to blurt out.

James was beside her now, looking down at her from between narrowed lids. "Naturally you don't, my dearest heart. You are a good wife, who loves her husband. So it is all gibberish to you. Of course, of course, and so it should be. But had you been, by any chance, a woman who had lost a lover, I think that you would understand well enough. Yes, yes. . . ."

He ran his hands over her body, let his fingers slide up inside the wide sleeves of the furred gown till they touched her flesh. She grew very still at his touch, as if she were holding her breath.

"Yes, lovers go, but husbands remain," said James.

*Part Four*

THE KING

*"Let it be your chiefest  
earthly glory, to excel  
in your own craft."*

JAMES VI., *Basilikon Doron*.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A LIGHT WIND FLURRIED the curtains of the casements on the High Street, and a patter of sudden raindrops sent the old wives hirpling to cover the goods on their Lawn-market stalls. But there was no real malice in it, for the clouds that sailed high above the Castle were islanded in oceans of such blue as only the craftsmen of Cathay sometimes succeeded in capturing in their silks. So thought Andrew Haliburton, as he crossed one lean, rheumatic knee over the other and half shut his eyes against the April blinks of sunshine, shifting his old bones a little on the bench set on the cobbles in front of his house.

He liked, these days, to be nearer the noisy, vigorous life of the streets than he was in the shadows of the booth behind. Rob, now a middle-aged man with a wife and family of his own, had bought a part share in the business to which he had been apprenticed and managed it all with unobtrusive shrewdness. But he still bent his bald head meekly before his late master's occasional tirades. They were like old times and did the old man good.

So Andrew Haliburton now had more time to sit in the sun and watch the people of Edinburgh about their affairs. The place had a comfortable air of prosperity, with new buildings going up and the markets always thronged. There was a continual rumble of carts, clip-clop of burdened beasts, shrill jumble of voices; milk-sellers with their buckets, and fishwives crying their caller herring, pedlars with their gaudy trays and persistent patter, sellers of comfits with a screaming train of children, and under all the throbbing of a

thousand hammers from smith and harness-maker, cobbler, carpenter and stone-mason, which seemed to Andrew Haliburton, as he sat listening to the good resounding din of it, like the heart-beats of the city itself, slowly regaining strength and confidence in the state of Scotland, ruled now by a king who had taken to himself a wife who would presently ensure the future.

She was taking her time about it, though, and people were beginning to grow impatient for the heir who would confirm their safety. Surely she could not be barren? That would be a calamity and no mistake, for where would the hard-won peace of the common people be if the nobles once got the chance of disputing the inheritance? But there was time enough, time enough. She was no more than a bairn, and at seventeen there were sufficient years of child-bearing before her to reassure even as fearful a country as Scotland.

Andrew Haliburton nodded to himself, then frowned as an armourer's apprentice came sauntering back to his master's booth, with a half-finished tourney helmet under his arm, and his eyes on the cheerful display set out on the stalls. He was singing one of the popular catches of the moment, and the old man shook his head as he caught some of the words:

“Our queen looked o’er the castle wa’  
Beheld both dale and down,  
And then she saw young Waters,  
Come riding to the town.”

The boy paused to nip a sweetmeat neatly from the tray of a man who was stooping to retrieve a coin from the cobbles, and afterwards the words were blurred. But as he lounged on past the booth he pushed the sticky lump into one cheek and sang on piercingly:

I've seen lord, and I've seen laird,  
And knights of high degree,  
But a fairer face than young Waters  
Mine een did never see.

"Out then spake the jealous king,  
(And an angry man was he)  
An' if he had been twice as fair,  
Ye might have excepted me——"

"Think shame on yourself," said Andrew Haliburton, "to sing such wicked nonsense about the streets. It's treasonable."

The boy gaped at him. "Everybody sings it."

"And if any of the gentry hears you you'll find yourself cooling your heels in the Tolbooth."

The boy put out his tongue. "Not much, Grandad, since it was the gentry that started the story." And he went on his way, still singing.

"Yet for a' that she could do or say,  
Appeased he wad na be,  
But for the words our queen did say,  
Young Waters he must dee. . . ."

"Tch, tch," said Andrew Haliburton. Young lads, these days, had neither decency nor loyalty. It made a man wonder what would happen if they were ever called on to defend their country against the Spaniards—or the English, for that matter, quiet though things seemed, with the old Queen as good as on her death-bed and the Scottish Court full of English lords making their peace with the next King. Yet what was the use of all this talk of the English throne when the lads at home sang scandalous songs about the streets, and the ministers of the Kirk openly opposed the King? And eh, but they were



thrown and obstinate, the ministers, demanding this right and demanding that, and stiff-necked against the royal authority. Dear aye, and Mathew Brodie would have been in the thick of it, and letting his friends in for who knew what trouble with the authorities. It was just as well, maybe, that he had been carried off with a cough a few years past. Andrew Haliburton rose and turned to go indoors with the deliberate care of a man come to the age of brittle bones, when every puddle and crevice in the cobbles must be individually scanned and negotiated. The ministers might be supreme in their own pulpits, but when it came to open conflict between the King and the Kirk he thought that he knew where the sympathy of most canny people lay.

Inside the booth he found Rob confronting a plainly-dressed young woman, who seemed to be of quality, in spite of her plain clothes, for a stupid-looking servant was picking his teeth by the door.

"Master Haliburton's standing behind you this instant, mistress," said Rob.

The young woman swung eagerly round. The merchant bowed.

"They tell me," she said rather breathlessly, "that there is no one in Edinburgh who will show me such fine taffeta."

"That is true," said Andrew Haliburton gravely.

The girl in the long blue cloak looked at him anxiously, seemed about to say something, then changed her mind, with a glance at the long-faced Rob. It began to dawn on Andrew Haliburton that she had more on her mind than the stuff for a new gown. He twisted his fingers thoughtfully through the crisp beard which was now white instead of sandy, and nodded Rob back to his ledgers in the room beyond, as he moved towards the coffer where his silks were kept.

"What colour had you in mind, mistress?" he asked, as he stooped creakily to unlock it.

"I—er—green—no, blue." Her tone was so vague that the merchant's eyebrows went up. He was not accustomed to ladies taking the colour of their clothes with such indifference. He returned to the counter with several lengths of stuff in his arms. "Here is a rich green," he said, unrolling a yard or so with a deft movement. "And here is a pretty blue, embroidered with knights in armour in silver thread. A pleasant fancy for ladies who attend the tilting-ground——" He was sure she came from the Court, but she neither admitted nor denied it.

"Yes. . . ." She was feeling its texture with careless fingers.

"And here is another, straight from the looms of Antwerp," said the merchant. "Particularly delicate, with the design of rose-buds and true lovers' knots. My son, who has been in the Low Countries, chose it himself——"

He heard her draw in her breath, and looked up to find that all her listlessness had gone. She was trembling, with her lower lip between her teeth. "I will take six ells of it," she said hastily.

Andrew Haliburton reached for his shears, and began to unroll the amount required. "And—anything else?"

"Gold braid——" the girl said jerkily.

The old merchant plodded back to the coffer. He wished he knew what his customer had on her mind. She was as restless as a jackdaw, and even while she waited her fingers were pleating and unpleating the materials on the counter, which could hardly do her much good and it would certainly not improve his silks. So when he came back with the braid he unobtrusively rolled up the unwanted lengths and laid them down at the far end of the counter.

"Yes, mistress?"

"I—er—please show me some orange velvet."

Master Haliburton unlocked another coffer in a state of perplexity. "Is there anything else?" he said at last. The pile of stuffs lay between them, and the girl eyed it wildly. Then, as if on a sudden resolution, with an imploring, uncertain gesture, she blurted out her question.

"Master Haliburton, where is your son?"

"My son?"

"Walter. Is he here?"

"He has been in my brother's warehouse in the Low Countries," said Walter's father cautiously.

"But is he home again? Can I see him?"

"What is your business with him?" asked the merchant doubtfully. How was he to know that this was not a decoy?

"My business—none—except that I have not seen him since that night at the window—and I—and——" Andrew Haliburton saw that she was in tears, and something hurt and desperate about her bearing told him the truth. He came round the end of the counter and laid a hand on her arm. "You are Mistress Ingerstrom, then?"

She nodded, her hands covering her face.

"Walter has told us the story," said the old man. "He came home yesterday, and it was all we could do to keep him from the Palace till we knew he would take no harm. This pardon that I have in safe keeping now. Is it genuine?"

"Yes, indeed," said Helga. "I saw his Majesty write it with his own hand. He will take no harm, Master Haliburton, I promise you."

"Then will you tell your servant to wait while you come upstairs with me?"

Helga followed him outside, and her servant sat down

philosophically on the bottom step of the fore-stair while they went up the time-hollowed treads and into the living-room.

On the settle sat Walter, his face glum and his chin propped on his hands.

Helga went towards him at a run. Andrew Haliburton saw his son rise, saw the blue cloak slip back and the girl's arms go round his neck. Then he turned and stumped downstairs again, for presently his wife would be back from the market and must be kept below.

"So you understand at last?"

Walter grinned. "Have I been so slow?"

"Very, very, *very* slow," said Helga, tweaking at his overhanging brows, still puckered in the remains of an uncertain frown. "Could I do more than I did?"

"But you could not bear the sight of me," objected Walter. "You said so."

"Dear love, when we are married, you must believe everything I say: till we are married, only that I love you—always."

"But then, why——?"

"Because—because—because even your anger was better than nothing. Because——" But Walter's lips were on her mouth and there all life seemed to pause, in flower, in sunshine, in heart's content.

"Tell me, Walter," said Helga at last "must we stay on at Court?"

Walter shook his head. "I went there to please my father and stayed there to serve the King. But I'll be glad to go. There's the lands in Fife, you see, given me by his Majesty, which sadly need a master to watch which way the profits go. There is a farm and—how will you like a farm, Helga?"

"Very well indeed. I was brought up on one."

"You could learn the ways of kitchen and dairy. It

will all be new to you—not grand enough, perhaps.” Walter looked worried.

“Indeed, and why should you suppose so?” said Helga with spirit. “My mother set me to work in the dairy when I was so high——”

“At least we need not quarrel about that,” said Walter in alarm.

“We shall never quarrel again,” said Helga with conviction.

Walter looked down at her vivid face and grinned doubtfully. “Shall we not?” he wondered. “Shall thunder leave answering lightning and fire let wood go unburned?”

“Do you mind?” murmured Helga. “Would you sooner have a sweet, meek wife who echoes every thought? I could perhaps learn to be such a paragon——”

“If you dare try to change yourself!” threatened Walter on a shout of laughter. “If you dare. . . .”

“I will not, my sweet,” said Helga with her nose flattened against his coat. “But what will his Majesty say to one of his Gentleman turned farmer from his Court?”

“Let him say what he likes,” said Walter. “But he will have enough work with his own affairs, from what I hear of my lord Bothwell.”

And actually, young Bothwell’s persistent, waspish attacks and precipitate retreats were keeping the Court in a continual state of flutter. In June he was again to be heard hammering on the gates of Falkland Palace: in August, he was said to be contemplating an attack on Dalkeith. Sometimes he was hidden in the Borders, at others he appeared in the Western Isles or the coast lands of Fife, trailing trouble and disturbance with him, if not with the actual approval at least without the censure of the ministers of the Kirk.

James bided his time. Francis should have as much rope as he required, and in due course it would probably hang him. He was unwilling to act precipitately, and also privately afraid of Bothwell and his rumoured league with the Devil. It would be just like Francis to exchange his soul for diabolic aid in destroying his cousin James.

And, come to think of it, there had always been something sulphuric about Francis, with his black beard and sudden gestures and blazing, bluish-lidded eyes. Anne, who was frankly terrified of the Border outlaw, said that her ladies told her that he wore high boots even in bed to hide the hairy hoofs below them, and that if one probed into that black thatch of his one would find the budding horns.

But that winter even Bothwell and his campaign of intimidation were forgotten in the scandal which broke out during the wedding celebrations of James's former schoolfellow, the Earl of Mar.

The Kirk, of course, had a hand in it. How they discovered that a certain ship sailing from the Clyde contained treasonable papers, no one knew, but discover it they did, with their usual detective ability. It was searched at the instigation of a local minister, and discovered to be carrying letters from the Scottish Catholic Earls to the King of Spain. Worse still, the budget contained a number of blank sheets, signed by the Earls of Huntly, Errol and Angus, and destined, according to the correspondence, to bear the terms of a projected treaty between these lords and King Philip of Spain.

The Kirk was not disposed to keep quiet about the discovery. From every pulpit in Scotland they blazed their triumph, declaimed that only the vigilance of the shepherds had saved the Protestant flock from the wolf of Catholicism, the snake in the bosom, the daggers of the traitors which waited for the body of Christ's Kirk.

So, in a whirl of metaphor and fury, the news of the Spanish Blanks went up and down the country, reaching James where he was spending Christmas with the newly-married Earl and Countess.

The people, primed by their ministers, howled for the trial and execution of the Catholic Earls, or alternately, for their execution without the formality of a trial. James was annoyed. Here was a pretty wasps' nest. He went indignantly back to Edinburgh and prepared to deal with the matter, ordering the unfortunate man who had been taken in possession of the letters to be tortured till he told what he knew. The result most exasperatingly justified the indignation of the ministers, for it revealed an elaborately-detailed plot by which a Spanish army was to descend on Scotland, receive hospitable assistance from the Scottish Catholic lords and conquer the country, holding the King's person at the disposal of Philip of Spain.

It was too much: James ordered the Catholic Earls to be tried for their lives. For once it seemed as if he and the Kirk were in agreement. James sat in Holyrood preparing plans of campaign by which the treasonable lords should be executed and their lands afterwards annexed to the Crown. The lands would come in useful; it was an ill wind . . . they said, and the Queen had begun to run up some very long bills with the prosperous Edinburgh goldsmith, George Heriot, who had such a persuasive way with him. So a little something in the Exchequer would not come amiss. James scribbled estimates on the margins of his notes, setting the soldiers' pay against the revenues of the confiscated lands. Quite a nice little balance remained.

But his calculations were interrupted by a servant, who begged admission for a man who came on private business which concerned the Queen.

"The Queen?" said James, in nervous irritation. "What can he mean? Why will he not give his name?"

"I do not know, your Majesty. He said he felt sure you would be wise to see him."

"Can it be that fellow pressing for his money, I wonder?" murmured James. "Was it like the goldsmith, Heriot?"

"I think it may well have been, your Majesty," said the servant stupidly. "At least, it was dark outside, and I did not see more than——"

"More than a hand offering a bright gold piece on its palm, no doubt," said James dryly. "Well, have him sent up, but see that the guard is summoned also."

"It seems that the matter is private, your Majesty," mumbled the servant, "and he—the man outside—said that you would not wish it overheard."

"Then it is that infernal goldsmith," said James. "Well, he cannot do me any harm. Send him up, but let the guard wait in the corridor within call. And have a look round the alcoves before you go. Poke the fire, light more candles. I do not like these dusky rooms where shadows wait and casements chatter. Look to the latches. Are they all sound?"

"All sound and fast, your Majesty," the servant reported, after shambling obediently round every corner and cranny of the small room, and lifting the dust-laden hangings to peer along the walls without rousing anything more alarming than a disconcerted mouse.

"Bring him up, then. But do not forget to see that the guard is posted." James sat at his writing-table, still scribbling figures, wondering how much longer he could persuade the hard-headed George Heriot to wait for payment on his Christmas gift, the string of superb pearls with which he hoped he had patched up the little disagreements which he and Anne had been having



lately. Perhaps it might be wise to offer some security. . . .

The door opened and some one came in. James did not stop writing at once. It was sometimes advisable to show these tradesmen that their King was as busy as the best of them. He reached the foot of a page, surveyed it, tossed it aside, and eventually looked up.

Across the table the Earl of Huntly watched him, smiling.

"Great heavens!" said James. He clutched the arms of his chair and took a quick breath preparatory to shouting for the guard. He was in danger of his life. He was alone with a traitor. Anything might happen to him——

"I will not harm you," said Huntly quickly. "But for your own sake you had better listen to me before you shout for the men I hear clashing about outside."

"What do you mean?" said James with dignity. "And how did you get here? You are under arrest. You will lose your head. And you will not save it by attacking me first," he added hastily.

The Earl of Huntly waved the suggestion aside. "I have not come here to do anything so absurd," he said contemptuously. "Merely to have a little talk with your Majesty."

"I do not talk to traitors," said James.

"You will, I think, talk to me," said the Earl. "If only because of another talk which we had together not so long ago. I was useful to your Majesty then, so it does not seem so unreasonable that your Majesty should be useful to me now."

"I do not know," said James with virtuous indignation, "what you can be talking about."

"No?" Huntly's smile was not pleasant. "Then let me remind you of that occasion, just a year ago, when you summoned me to rid you of your enemy, the Earl of Moray——"

"The Earl of Moray? *My* enemy? What nonsense is this?" said James. "I gave you a royal commission to punish Bothwell and his allies. There was to be no killing, I said. If you took it into your head to avenge your private feuds when executing your official duty that is no affair of mine."

"Is it not?" smiled the Earl. "I think your Majesty is mistaken, or at least forgetful. But perhaps I can help your memory. You see, I am suspicious enough to prefer the written to the spoken word, or at least to support the spoken word with witnesses. When I came here, last spring, we had a talk."

"I do not remember," said James.

"I thought you might not." The Earl was unperturbed. "So I came to remind you."

"How can you remind me of something which never happened?" James was beginning to fluster. "You have invented this interview. It is no better than blackmail. I will call for help and have you silenced——"

"Dead men are safe and silent, are they not, your Majesty?" Huntly looked down on James's vehement gestures with his hands planted on his hips and his feet astride on the King's own hearth-rug. In his complacency he was easily master of the situation. "The Earl of Moray will not cry out against you—or me for that matter—from his lonely grave. His mother's tears cannot bring back her son. Does his ghost lie quiet, I wonder? Or will it come here and cry for its spoilt beauty?"

"Why should you lay your murder at *my* door?" blustered James.

"If we know anything after death," said Huntly grimly, "I think we will know who brought us to our end. And young Moray will perhaps think his life a heavy price for rousing the jealousy of a king."

"This is sheer nonsense." James brought his fist down

among his papers. "I will not hear another word. If you have come here to get your neck out of its noose by threatening me with superstitious rubbish and invented interviews you may spare yourself the pains."

"Alas, the treachery of the spoken word," murmured Huntly. "If I had but insisted on a note in your own hand. Yes, I was out-manoeuvred there. But perhaps some one saw me come——"

"No one saw you come," said James in incautious triumph. "I had the place specially cleared——"

"Ah, so you have remembered at least that I *did* come, your Majesty?" said Huntly with a smile.

"On other business—yes, perhaps."

"On *that* occasion, your Majesty," persisted Huntly. "The occasion on which the side way to your apartments was specially cleared, as you explained just now."

"You may say what you like," cried James, whose self-control had begun to give way under this oblique attack. "But there is no record, and who will accept your word against the King's?"

"Some, some," drawled Huntly. "Perhaps the Kirk, for instance. They are already willing to believe that the Queen's interest in the true religion may be leading you also from the thistle-strewn pastures of the Protestant flock. And there was a certain paper found, in your Majesty's own hand, which set out the advantages and disadvantages of Spanish aid——"

"No more will be heard of that paper," said James quickly. "I have seen to that."

"The written word, your Majesty, is always more difficult to suppress than the spoken. That is why I took care to see that our interview did not rest merely on the spoken word."

"What's that?"

"I anticipated something of this kind, your Majesty. So I did not come alone."

"But you *were* alone. I insisted on it."

"Wonderful how the details of that *imaginary* interview are coming back, isn't it, your Majesty?" murmured Huntly. "Well, as to the witnesses. I contrived—no matter how: it was worth the money—to have two honest and impoverished clerks admitted and concealed behind the arras. These men heard every word and afterwards recorded their substance. They will swear to what they heard."

"Bah, no court of law would admit their testimony."

"I was not thinking of a court of law," said the Earl of Huntly.

"Then what use are your witnesses?"

"I think that their testimony would interest—the Queen, for instance," said Huntly, pushing up the ends of his moustache with his short, strong fingers. "I doubt if she has quite forgotten the Earl of Moray's death."

James was on his feet, his face livid. "You shall not do it. I will have you thrown into prison, silenced out of hand——"

"Oh, no, your Majesty. I have left complete records of the whole affair. They will be discovered by my heirs and made public on the event of my sudden death. There is no escape, that way——"

"Then—how?"

The Earl of Huntly grinned. "I thought I should find your Majesty reasonable. I only wish to secure the safety of my friends and myself. Listen. Angus is imprisoned. He must be allowed to escape. Errol and I must be given the chance of getting free from the country and going abroad till the trouble has died down. This affair with Spain—pouf——" he snapped his fingers—"there is nothing in it. Philip is too strict in his terms. There

would be no profit for us. So you will hear no more of it if you will see that we, with our wives and families, are unharmed."

"But," James looked round him wildly, "what will happen to me? The Protestant nobles, the Council, the Kirk, will have me off my very throne if I do not persecute. I must lead an army into the north."

The Earl of Huntly made a gesture of conciliation. "I told you I was not unreasonable," he said soothingly. "Lead your army, sack and burn here and there. We are used to it in the north. It will be but a gowk's storm, and we can wait overseas till its April is over. A year or two . . . a humble petition . . . and we will be back in our estates again, none the worse."

"And if not?"

"Ah, if I die too suddenly, these papers will reach the Queen more quickly than you can stop them," said the Earl of Huntly. He leaned towards the King to add meaningly, "you, sir, know best whether her trust in you is one to remain unshaken by such evidence."

"May God damn your soul to Hell!" said James with concentrated violence. "Now go."

"We understand each other, I think, as we said once here before."

"Yes."

Huntly bowed and withdrew.

James drove the point of the quill he had been fidgeting with into the table with such force that it crumpled to the feather. Then he sat for a long time, looking at it, with fear and fury twisting his thin lips. He was not accustomed to being outwitted, and he detested the position. Was there no way out? Should he have this man silenced? No, for fear that his talk of records to be made public at his death were by any chance true. The Kirk would pounce on them.

So James temporised, unwilling to accept Huntly's terms, yet not daring definitely to refuse them. As an earnest of good intentions Angus was allowed to escape to join his allies in the north. The Kirk fumed and James evaded their petitions.

He had, as a matter of fact, a good deal of anxiety just then, for his tiresome cousin Francis Bothwell had returned to the attack, financed surreptitiously by Elizabeth for the purpose of furthering discord. If Scotland were quiet, the question of the English Succession would occupy its statesmen, and as she grew older she liked that topic less and less. It was hard enough to keep her own councillors away from it: must she be reminded by every shabby envoy from the northern kingdom that she, the peacock of the world, must die?

So Bothwell was up in arms again. He laid his plans to invade Holyrood once more, in the summer of 1593. The Edinburgh house of the Gowrie family gave access to the Palace: Lady Atholl, who was aware of the plot, was the old Countess of Gowrie's daughter. She admitted Bothwell and his friends, and it was afterwards one more black mark against the house of Gowrie that James, early on that summer morning, should have been confronted on his own back-stair by the white teeth and blazing, fanatical eyes of his crazy cousin.

James drew back, shaking and crossing himself. The man looked diabolic. "Why have you come here? You shall not have my soul. . . ."

Bothwell raged grandiloquently. He wanted no man's soul. He had come to secure a fair hearing for himself. He had come for justice. He had a right at least to a hearing, and he would have it, now that he held the King's life in his hand. His long sword caught the first sunshine but James's mood had changed from terror to rage as Bothwell showed himself more man than devil. He faced

that threat, he shouted: "Strike if you dare! I am your anointed King."

But they were no longer alone. The lords attending the King had forced their way into the chamber and Bothwell, exhibitionist as he was, saw that the moment of domination had gone. He passed a hand across his eyes, as if dazed by the split second's suspension of consciousness typical of the minor form of epilepsy. In the next instant he was on his knees, blubbering penitence. He was the King's man: he only wanted a chance to prove his loyalty. He held out his sword by the hilt, laid his head on the ground and set James's foot upon his hair. He babbled and James scolded, while the lords who had crushed into the ante-room argued noisily amongst themselves. There was a long and wearisome scene. James promised Bothwell a fair trial on the charge of witchcraft, but ordered him to leave the Court meanwhile. The sight of his cousin gave him a tickling sensation like a dagger point, just below his ribs, and though since his marriage he had taken to wearing a quilted waistcoat for fear of assassination, he always had the impression that his cousin's fierce eyes were raking him for other vital spots.

So Bothwell went careering off to England with messages of thanks to Elizabeth for her help in obtaining justice at last. And after various contretemps, the trial was held, Bothwell vindicated, and dust allowed to settle on the matter. But not for long: one triumph whetted appetite, and by the spring of 1594 Bothwell was riding madly for the gates of Holyrood again, with a scheme of getting himself recognised Lord Lieutenant of Scotland, heir presumptive and heaven knew what besides.

But this time he was unsuccessful. The angry guard turned out: a few random bullets splintered through casements and some heads were broken. It all ended in

a few minutes, with cursing and clamour and a whirl of retreating hooves, but James was shaking again as he hurried to the Queen's boudoir where she was dozing through the afternoon in the rosy shadow of softly-coloured curtains.

"Who is that?" Her voice was sharp and frightened.

"James."

"Oh. Well, I wish you would tell them not to make so much noise outside the gate. All my women have gone running out to see what is the matter. What has gone wrong? Tell me at once, and don't stand there gibbering at me with your teeth rattling in your head. Are we attacked? Can we escape?" Anne sat up among her satin pillows, her small face yellow and peaked.

"It is all over now. It was Francis again."

"I thought as much. That man should be put under lock and key. There is hardly a palace up and down the country in which I, the Queen, can sleep in safety. It is disgraceful, *disgraceful*, James. You should be ashamed to be made a laughing-stock. Have you no soldiers? Can some one not put a bullet through him?"

"He is popular," said James, "with the Kirk and the people besides."

"Popular, indeed! As if there were no means of putting a man away as if by accident. I call that silly talk. It wouldn't be the first time that an inconvenient man had been done away with——" James looked at her sharply, but she did not seem to intend any particular application of this remark, "and I'll be bound it won't be the last "

"I can't go about having men assassinated in these days," grumbled James. "Think what the Kirk would say."

"I don't give *that* for what the Kirk would say," scolded Anne, "but I tell you this, you obstinate, righteous-minded stick, that you'll have your wife, who is, I suppose,



just a little more important than the slobber-bearded old dotards of the Kirk, scared into giving birth to a monster if you don't put an end to this persecution."

"What's that?" James had sprung forward, caught her by the wrists. "D'you mean——"

"Yes, I do, and you're hurting me. Let go my wrists. If I am to bear children to the high and mighty realm of Scotland I must be left in peace. Any poor peasant woman in Denmark can count on more consideration than has been shown to me. . . ."

James slid to his knees beside the great bed, murmuring incoherently, kissing her palms, her forearms, the sleeve of her gown.

"Anne . . . Anne . . . you will bear me a son . . . blessed art thou . . . my love . . . swear you are not mistaken. . . ?"

"If you'd been through the vomiting that's taken me these last few days while you've been too busy to come near me you'd know I wasn't mistaken," said Anne tartly.

"A son . . . a son . . ." whispered James, his face hidden. "I will have prayers said in every church. . . . I will make him a knight . . . he shall be taught all the arts of war and peace. . . . I will search Europe for tutors . . . Oh, Anne, the whole country will rise up and call you blessed . . . and I . . . and I . . ." He smiled up at her, his eyes blurred. "It will be so different, the world which holds my son."

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ANNE LAY ON HER DAY-BED in her withdrawing-room on the first floor of the gauntly ornate building known as the Palace within Stirling Castle. It was, she thought pettishly, more like a prison. The pale blinks of winter sunshine were marked off into squares as they came and went across the floor by the iron gratings which defended the windows. The gratings had been put there, James had explained, when he himself was a boy in Stirling, and when Anne had protested that since they had served their purpose they might be removed now, he had shaken his head and murmured something about their coming in useful yet.

Anne wondered, as she lay there, half asleep still, but roused by the disturbing movements of the child within her, what he could have meant. James had been little better than an orphan, asylumed in that horrible Castle where she had been brought to give birth to her first child. Things were different now. Her son would have his parents about him, his childhood should be like that of her own family, noisy and happy in the sea-castle of Cronenburg. Her son . . . or her daughter. James was sure it would be a son. All preparations had been made to receive a prince: what would happen if the baby were a girl instead? There would be such consternation in the country . . . she believed they would almost send her back home to Denmark for having failed in her duty. She turned her head over her shoulder to where several of her ladies were busy by the fireside with embroidery or spinning-wheel. They rose and came to her.

"Your Majesty is awake?" asked Beatrice Ruthven.

Anne nodded, smiling at the lovely face of her favourite Maid of Honour.

"Is there anything I can do for your Majesty?"

"Tell me how I may contrive to produce a son," said Anne with a little grimace, "when all the sour-faced old ministers who are turning their stomachs by praying for me are convinced that I will do no better than a mere girl. I would do almost anything to spite them, even repeat some of the bad old spells for which they burn people. Do you know any spells, Beatrice?"

"None, Madam."

"Yet your family has a name for wisdom, hasn't it?" Anne went on idly as she reached for her embroidery. "I seem to remember hearing of secret parchments and magic words. . . ."

"That is all nonsense, Madam," said Beatrice Ruthven a little breathlessly. "There may have been wise men in our family once, but now my father is dead and my brothers, as you know, students at the University of Padua, with no use for unlawful knowledge."

"When do they come home, your brothers?" asked Anne. "We could do with a few gay people in Scotland, goodness knows."

"They will not be home for some years yet, your Majesty," said Beatrice. "My elder brother, Gowrie, says he will stay on in Padua till Alexander's course is finished, so that he may keep him out of mischief."

"Are they like you, these brothers?"

"They say that Alexander is my very image, Madam. Gowrie is graver, and cares more for his weapons. But Alexander is a musician, and dances well, Madam, though I say so."

"Then I wish that Alexander would make haste over his education," said Anne, as she unravelled a twist of brilliant silk.

"Shall I give him your message, Madam?"

"Do," said Anne, laughing. "And at the same time you might ask Gowrie if he has not even a little spell tucked away which might help me."

"They say," ventured another Maid of Honour, "that a few hairs plucked from the tail of a black bull at the moment of service, seethed in milk into which a drop of blood taken from the finger of a male child of less than a year has been stirred, is a certain specific for the birth of a son if it be sipped under the new moon."

"My mother told me once," added another, "that bread made from flour moistened with the milk of a black goat which is suckling its first kid should be eaten with——"

"No. The best way is to wear one of the father's hose wrapped round——"

"Take the vital parts of a newly killed——"

"Make a little bag of linen bleached on Midsummer's Eve——"

"The caul in which a male child has been born——"

Anne put her fingers in her ears. "Stop. Stop! The more I hear the surer I am that it will be a girl, and the King will never forgive me."

But her fears were unfounded. Whether the bull's-hair-milk or any of the other devices had anything to do with it or not, the child which was born in Stirling Castle on the 19th of February, 1594, was the son on whom James had set his heart, and the christening a month later as gorgeous a ceremony as James's own had been.

Sir James Melville, standing because of his office, close beside the Queen, remembered the earlier scene and sighed for so many great names who were now names only, thanking Heaven meekly that he himself was still Master of the Queen's Household, busy with the familiar old routine of ceremonial instead of lying in an uneasy grave

like so many of his old friends. The Queen of England's presents were handsome, yes, handsome enough, a cupboard overgilt with silver, and some fine cups of solid gold, though they were not so heavy as those from the States of Holland, which he could scarcely lift. He seemed to remember that the gold font she had sent to James's christening had been finer. Perhaps the old woman was growing careful in her later days, or perhaps she thought that James and his son would inherit everything she possessed soon enough.

However, the christening went off pretty well. The Queen accepted the jewels from the Scottish nobles with a graceful languor which was very suited to the occasion and made some appropriate comment on each gift before she handed it to an attendant who placed it on the table with the rest.

And James, in a glow of pride and happiness, seemed to have recaptured something of the exaltation with which he had set out to bring home his bride as he bent, sword in hand, over his month-old son, touching him warily with the flat of the cold blade, declaiming the resounding series of his titles: "Right Excellent High and Magnanimous Frederick Henry, Henry Frederick, by the Grace of God, Knight and Baron of Renfrew, Lord of the Isles, Earl of Carrick, Duke of Rothesay, Prince and Great Steward of Scotland."

Henry Frederick, who was not a nervous child, was more interested by the touch of the steel and the coronet than appalled by the crowd round him as he lay in the awkward arms of the Duke of Lennox, who found the office of next-of-kin at a christening one degree more distasteful than his duties at the Queen's Coronation. But all the things his father said afterwards, in his deep rough voice, just broken up a little by the emotion he could not entirely control, bored the new Prince extremely. He

opened an amiably toothless mouth and yawned in the face of the King of Scotland as he pronounced his honours over him.

At last the ceremony was over. Ambassadors, nobles, smaller fry called for their escorts and departed, while Stirling became busy with another sort of preparation, for at last James, who had offered his son's birth and baptism as a final excuse, had made up his mind to set out on his long-promised punitive expedition against Huntly and the other Catholic Earls who were still at large in the north.

But it was September before they set out, a fine, golden month in the Highlands, and James, thankful to have put ceremonial behind him and with the thought of his son in Stirling to keep his heart warm, promised himself as much hunting as harrying. His army had been partly financed by Elizabeth, and enjoyed themselves doing a certain amount of sacking and burning. They blew up a stronghold or two for the look of the thing, and hung about a good deal, eating the unfortunate villagers on whom they were billeted out of the best part of their winter provisions. But there was more commotion than performance, and the Kirk waited in vain for the news of the capture of the chief offenders, who had of course prudently retreated to the Continent as the drums beat James's army out of Stirling Castle.

James soon had enough of it. He considered that he had made himself sufficiently felt, with his trail of blazing farmhouses and the bleating herds over which the last dust-clouds of the year hung as they were driven south, perquisites of his avenging host. So he named the Duke of Lennox as his lieutenant in the north, and rode home himself in a new, intriguing glow of paternity, to the wife and family who awaited him at Stirling.

He surveyed the country with a new eye as he rode

through it. Was it not his kingdom, his son's inheritance, which he, the father, held in trust for his son? There was much that he, James, had still to do, before he could present his heir with a goodly heritage. He had, he thought, obtained peace in the land, and the merchants, with their thrifty foresight, would support him, because their interests were his own. The nobles, too, had been brought more or less to heel, thanks to the changing times which made ready money an increasing necessity, and turned the old feudal life as petty kings on their own estates into a fading memory of the past.

But there remained one obstinate element which threatened his supremacy in his kingdom, an element which must be dominated, as other obstreperous elements had been dominated; the Kirk of Scotland. James frowned as he thought of the ministers, led by Andrew Melville, the presumption with which they defied him, and the familiarity with which they evoked the mysterious name of God. No, his kingdom would not be ready for his son until he had compelled the Kirk to acknowledge the full authority of the King of Scotland as well as the ghostly empire of the King of Kings.

But that could wait. His wife and son came first, for however tarnished his dawn-gilded image of Anne might have become, she was now the mother of his child, and for that he owed her perpetual duty and protection. She might have failed and betrayed his dreams, but she had made herself his forever when she had given him Henry, that bud in which the future lay so miraculously furled.

At the thought of Henry he set his horse briskly at the rough hill before him. How long the way was, and how uneven. That was one of the things he must discuss with his son, later on. The country could do with a thoroughly organised system of roads along which wheeled

traffic might bowl from town to town, instead of these rutted tracks in which carriages floundered all winter and passengers choked with dust in summer time. Henry must see to that. The country would be rich enough by then to endure the extra taxation which would be necessary. Then there was the question of a scheme for the universities which would keep the finest young brains from leaving Scotland for the schools on the Continent. That, too, would be something to which Henry, young himself, should give his special attention.

James thought reverently, wistfully of Henry's youth, which would be so different from his own, even if the scene were also Stirling, the hereditary nursery of the Scottish Kings. He had been alone; but Henry would have his father at his back. A boy needed his father. Once he could get him weaned from these women and their coddling and crooning, he would see that the boy grew up into the great ruler who would take from his father's failing hand the united kingdom: Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales. What a gift! Had any man ever such an inheritance to offer his son before?

But Henry must be educated to receive it; educated not merely by scholars and pedants, but by the father who was going to be his son's best friend as well as the king who knew the problems he would encounter. He, James, would help him. He would set down his creed, bit by bit, in a book, during these waiting years of his son's infancy, so that when the boy was grown he might read it and learn. He pictured Henry a dozen years hence, his bright head bent gravely over his father's book, loving the father as much as he revered the king. No doubt he and Henry would sometimes disagree, have arguments; that was as it should be. It would be pleasant to burnish his brains against the whetstone of youth. He would come often to Stirling . . . hear the



boy gabble through his Latin verbs with his head full, as his had been, of thoughts of his first pony waiting in the courtyard below.

Yes, that first pony. It would be his father's gift. They would ride together, the boy on a pretty little beast with no vices, while he, James, rode something steady that would upset neither the pony nor the prince. James let the reins fall loose on his horse's neck as the experienced creature picked his way down the slope towards the plain where the loops of the Forth glimmered like a silver ribbon tossed carelessly on the green, and the crouched lion shape of Stirling Castle rose black against the west.

The plain was empty and silent, save for the cavalcade which wound its way down from the hills behind the King, but for James it was busy with visions through which the figures of a man and a boy rode side by side, strolled arm-in-arm, sat over the same book, the *Basilikon Doron*, the Royal Gift, which the King would prepare for his son.

Two figures, never three. James had not forgotten his wife, but he did not include her in his dream pictures. She had produced his son, and as his mother she must be suitably honoured; but the sooner her share in his upbringing was ended the better. All his instinct warned him against the influence with which a mother would oppose his own. The presence of young Henry was already changing James's attitude towards his wife from a personal relationship to a relationship at second-hand, which varied according to her behaviour towards his son.

As they rode across the plain the black bulk of the castle seemed to grow and dominate the whole western sky where the sunset glow was fading to ashes above the surrounding winter peaks. James beat his hands together

in their leather gauntlets and put his heels to his horse's sides at the prospect of fire and food.

The royal party's arrival brought a scuttle of grooms and stable-boys from the shelter of the outhouses, and James swung himself to the ground with clumsy haste.

"How is the Prince?"

"I had not heard that he ailed anything, your Majesty," stammered the boy, disconcerted by the fierce question.

"Idiot!" said James, making for the door which led into the Palace, well ahead of his hurrying gentlemen. Inside it he collared a page. "Go to her Majesty's rooms and ask her if the Prince is well. Bring me word while I change my clothes."

The boy shot off, and James pounded up the stone stairs which led to his own apartments, remembering with a crooked smile how he had once, long ago, been so eager to find his bride that he rushed into her presence all dripping and stained and mired. He would not do that now. Things had changed since then. Kicking off his heavy boots, James remembered Anne's fancy for the Earl of Moray, and frowned. That was something which must not occur again. It was not now a question of her personal reputation, but of her position as Henry's mother. That, above all, must not be exposed to the lightest breath of scandal or reproach. Henry should never overhear the sort of talk which had sickened his own childhood, nudging, salacious, speculative talk, exposing his mother's charms more bawdily, by hint and grin and gesture, than if she had been stripped before his eyes. No one should be able to speak so to Henry. His mother must see to it. And if she would not, he would see to it himself.

At that moment the page came panting back with the news that the Prince was well, and the Queen awaited his Majesty's convenience. James grunted his satisfaction

and took his time over changing his clothes and going down to supper in order to prolong the delicious anticipation of seeing his son again.

Half an hour later he wiped the traces of gravy from his mouth and dabbled his fingers perfunctorily in the basin of rose-water they offered him while his messenger ran upstairs to inform the Queen that he proposed to wait upon her in her apartments at once.

Anne received the news without interest, and the message she sent back contained only a formal expression of pleasure. She sighed as her attendant ladies changed her easy chamber robe for a weightier and more ceremonious toilette, complete with farthingale and stomacher and high wired ruff.

She would have preferred to be left in peace to play by the fire with that astonishing little creature, her baby, who reminded her of one of Ulric's Italian puppets, except that he was ten times more enchanting. She wished that she could have a whole set, like Ulric had, and that he would stay like that always, pink and plump and incoherently gurgling when prodded with an experimental forefinger, smelling and feeling so stirringly, curiously her own.

James, of course, poor dear, did not understand children in the least. He came and stared at her baby and talked of education and swordsmanship and state affairs which he would presently discuss with his son. Anne slid her little finger into the custody of a vaguely flapping fist and giggled at the thought. James, with his ideas and his everlastingly reiterated insistence on "my son. . . ." Was he not *her* son, too? Well, then, what nonsense it all was!

A rustle and gathering together of skirts as the ladies round her rose and curtsyed warned her that the King had arrived. She did not rise, but sat where she was in

the tuffet by the fire with the pink and naked infant waving his limbs on the aproned surface of her knees. She smiled and put her head a little on one side, conscious of posing prettily as a Queen who was mother enough to do the little things for her baby which she might well have left to that baby's train of attendants.

She pretended to be unaware that James was standing close by, watching her, as she reached one of the child's garments from the deep basket beside her, and fitted it, not too skilfully, over the waving legs. But the carefully-posed picture was somewhat upset by the puckering, crimson face and piercing yell which followed an accidental pinch to the baby's cherubic bottom.

James frowned.

"Hush, hush then, my poppet . . ." murmured Anne, pulling inexpertly at tapes and corners. The infant took a deep breath and let out another roar, turning plum colour with temper and exertion.

"Shall I send for the physician?" said James in alarm.

"Why, no, your Majesty," said Anne, restraining herself in the presence of the amused circle of ladies. "That will hardly be necessary. It is perhaps a little disorder of the stomach. . . ." She patted inexpertly, and succeeded in changing the roar to a hiccough.

"The boy is ill," declared James.

"He is not," snapped Anne, exasperated by the failure of her display of motherhood. "He was perfectly well and happy a minute ago. Send for the head nurse, Beatrice. His clothes cannot fit him. I shall speak to the sempstress about it. Ah, here you are, nurse. Please see what is wrong with this child. I cannot endure the noise any longer. It is nothing but temper."

The head nurse curtsied, then stooped over the furious baby, picking him up with little tossing move-

ments and chuckling noises. Anne bit her lip with vexation as the roars immediately stopped.

"Take him away," she said. "He seems to be over-tired "

"Tuts, the wee de'il, then. Eh, what a temper ye've got, my hinny! . . . would ye hit me in the face wi' thae wee fists . . . there's a mannie then . . . there's a soldier. . . ." The nurse moved off, murmuring to the now wildly smiling Henry, while the ladies silently picked up the nursery paraphernalia scattered round the Queen before following her out.

"So you've carried out the bidding of the Kirk," Anne said, when they had gone.

"The bidding of the Kirk?" James was indignant.

"Well, was it not the Kirk who were crying for the blood of the unfortunate Catholics in the north?" said Anne, setting her feet on the hearth, careless of singeing the rich brocade of her gown. "You only went off to satisfy them."

"I did nothing of the sort," said James, nettled. "I went to show an example to the rest of the country, that the king is not to be defied with impunity."

"So you've made that clear? How pleased the ministers will be. When they thunder about the Lord's avenging sword on Sabbath one feels their God must take pleasure only in shambles."

"You are spoiling your gown," said James peevishly. "And I shall have to pay for a new one. I did not undertake this expedition to satisfy the ministers, and it does not matter to me now whether they are satisfied or not. I have done all that is necessary for the peace of the kingdom, and there the matter shall rest. As you know, I am for toleration. Why should the country lose any of its defenders because, forsooth, they think differently from Master Andrew Melville and the rest?"

"Then why not leave the Catholics in peace?"

"Because," said James, leaning back in his high-backed chair and fingering the patches of thinning hair on his temples, "heresy, which is Catholicism nowadays, is twisted up with treason, and these two will not be disentangled in our time. That will be for Henry to do, if it may be done. Of course, I will do what I can to guide him, as only a father can. On the way home, Anne, I was making plans for a new book——"

"*Another* book?" Anne checked a yawn. "What about this work of yours from which you have been reading me passages which gave me bad dreams afterwards?"

"Oh, I shall finish the *Daemonology* first," said James, nodding complacently. "It is a most important contribution to the history of witchcraft. I have shown the first chapters to scholars who think really highly of it, they tell me. Yes, I will finish that first, though it will take time, for the material has to be gathered from many sources. But between whiles I will make notes for a book on the craft of kingship——"

"And then you will send it to all the crowned heads of Europe, no doubt," laughed Anne. "It seems to me the sort of gift which might be misunderstood."

"I shall write it for Henry," said James. "It will be divided into sections for the public and private virtues, and I shall be careful to anticipate the problems with which he will be faced, so that he need only turn to it in any difficulty——"

"You talk as if he were already a grown man," said Anne, half in amusement, half in jealousy of her baby's precious helplessness.

"As he will be, soon enough."

"Oh, James, what nonsense," giggled Anne. "He will be his mother's baby for years——"

"On the contrary," James spoke sharply. "He is the

Prince and Steward of Scotland already, and his education will begin as soon as we leave Stirling for Holyrood in the spring."

"But, James, how *can* it?"

"He will have his own household, here in Stirling, just as I had——"

"*What?*" All the amusement had left Anne's face. It was fierce and incredulous. "But he will come with us to Holyrood, spend the summer with me at Falkland or Dalkeith."

"He will stay here at Stirling."

"But this is lunacy. You—you must be joking——"

"I am entirely in earnest."

"But you cannot—you cannot——"

"Stirling," went on James inexorably, "is the nursery of the heirs of the Scottish crown. I spent my boyhood here and so did my father before me. The Earl of Mar is hereditary guardian of the Scottish princes."

"But you and your father were crowned as children, without parents to protect you," said Anne shrilly. "Our child has both father and mother. He must be brought up with his family, not orphaned in this barracks."

"It is impossible," said James. "I tell you, Anne, it is not by my wish——"

"Yes, it is," Anne interrupted him savagely. "I see it all. You are jealous. You want to keep him for your own, away from me."

There was enough truth in the accusation for James to look slightly uncomfortable, but he stuck doggedly enough to the main point. "It will not help us, Anne, to quarrel. I will explain it all if you will be patient——"

"I will not be patient," cried Anne wildly. But James went on as if she had not spoken.

"Scotland has been an uneasy country, full of great men who want to make themselves greater, and know

that the surest way is to gain possession of the heir to the throne. I myself in my youth was kidnapped again and again by one side or the other, and used against my—used to advance the men who had captured me,” he concluded abruptly, aware that it would scarcely pacify Anne to be reminded that his upbringing had influenced him against his mother.

“You do not seem to have been so safe in this hereditary prison of yours,” said Anne in triumph. “Our child may be kidnapped too, if he is left here. Think of it, James——”

“I have absolute confidence in the loyalty and strength of the Earl of Mar, and the discretion of the old Countess, who brought me up herself.”

“And what a substitute for a mother!” cried Anne. “That gaunt, grey woman—oh, James, you cannot mean it—my poor baby——”

“I do mean it. That poor baby, as you call him, is the heir to the kingdoms of Scotland, England——”

“I do not care if he is heir to all the kingdoms of the world,” cried Anne. “He is my son, and it shall not be done.”

“He is my son, too, and I say that it *shall*,” said James coldly. Anne’s resistance was merely hardening his purpose. Henry should be brought up as a prince, not as a mother’s darling. It might mean that he, too, would see less of his son, but at least Henry would be out of reach of his mother’s clinging, cloying affection which would work always to make the child her own, not his.

“It shall not, it must not, James.” Anne was on her feet now, beating her hands together, her face flushed and twisted into hysterical rage. “I will get the Council to make an order——”

“The Council can do nothing,” said James coldly. “It is part of the law of Scotland——”



"What do I care for laws," sobbed Anne. "I want my baby."

"You shall see him regularly. We will visit Henry here in Stirling, several times a year," promised James.

"Regularly—*regularly*—several times a year when I want him always! How can you suggest such a thing? Am I not to know when he cuts his first tooth, takes his first steps—is he to call for other women with the first words he learns to speak? Think of the agony I endured for him—think of what a mother means to her child. James, James, I beg you to have pity—to have pity on us both——"

"It is not for me to decide," said James with satisfaction. "It is the law of Scotland, as I have told you already."

"But the king is above the law," cried Anne. "You can do anything you like, James, because you are king. You have said so many times. Do this for me. Let me have my baby."

"He is not *your* baby. He is the Prince of Scotland," said James. His mouth was obstinately folded, his eyes were narrowed to slits.

Anne lost the rest of her control and positively shook her fists in his face. "Oh, you are a monster, a devil, you enjoy tormenting me. I know you, James, you are so smooth and so easy and so secret. You never go straight for what you want, but by twisted ways, so that no one can follow. You want to take everything from me—*everything*—and keep me here alone, in this abominable country, without friends, without pleasures, dependent on you even for a sight of my child——"

James watched her from between drooping lids, and when she paused for breath he spoke deliberately. "You are the Queen of Scotland. I must see that you behave suitably."

"You do not care what happens to *me*," sobbed Anne.

"Only for the good name of the Queen. You do not love our child——"

"Do I not?" said James on an indrawn breath.

"——but only the prince, the *prince* and the power and the kingdom. I, your wife, could drop dead at your feet and you would only be concerned lest the jewels had been shaken from my crown—Oh, *God*, how well I know you, stooping and creeping about, between your books and your secrets, with your mean, twisted ways of getting what you want, of taking away things from other people because you cannot have them yourself."

"You must be crazed," said James harshly.

"Yes," gasped Anne, dashing away the tears which trickled childishly down her face, then pointing a shaking forefinger at James. "I am—and can you wonder? I have married a monster. I am trapped, trapped in your power till I die, to bear you more children which will belong to you and to the kingdom, not to me, to have them taken from me before they are weaned from my breast, to be served as a beast is served, to establish the royal house of Stuart, to spend my days and my nights at your pleasure, to be your slut, your drab, to have neither love nor understanding, to see my friends wither as if I had death's touch, because you cannot bear me to look at another man for fear the sight of you should sicken me afterwards. I have not forgotten how the Earl of Moray died——"

James started. Had Huntly broken his word? If so, he should suffer for it.

"I see you remember, too," screamed Anne. "The boy who died because I loved him. Yes, I did, you might as well know it, and I know, too, that if the Earl of Huntly killed him it was because you had not the spirit to do your own dirty work——"

James was out of his chair and across the room to her

in a few strides. His hands whitened the flesh of her arms as he shook her to and fro. "Be quiet . . ." he commanded. "Be quiet, will you? These things must not be said, even by the Queen, even in such madness. Any one might hear——"

"Then it's true?" she blazed at him.

"Yes," shouted James. "True then and true again if need be."

"Oh. . . ." She was suddenly limp in his grasp. He let her go and she sank slowly back on the tuffet where he had first seen her with the baby on her knees. On her upper arm the marks of his fingertips gradually turned from white to purplish red. She stared at him, stony-faced.

Slowly James regained his normal caution. "Listen," he said hurriedly, "I only spoke so to frighten you. It is nonsense. But is it true that I think more of your position as my Queen than you do, or so it seems."

"Oh, no," said Anne. "I am most careful of the honour of the kingdom, James." She tilted back her head and laughed, a little tremulously. "You needn't be afraid. Moray was nothing to me and you were not his murderer. You have nothing, nothing to fear."

"I am glad to hear it," said James.

She came to him, then, her face averted to hide the disgust she could not trust herself entirely to hide, as she wheedled, twisting her hand into his. A beast in a trap, she was thinking, does well to make friends with its captor. "Dear James, say that this talk about the child was meant to try my love of you and of the child. Now it is all over, and we—we shall all leave Stirling together, shall we not?" Her voice broke a little, not quite under control.

James shook his head. "That is impossible," he said.

"James, do you love me?"

"I hope I feel for you, the respect and affection that a man should show his wife," said James.

"I said *love*," persisted Anne.

James considered the word, his lips disapprovingly pursed. He preferred to wrap his feelings up, these days, in vague and roundabout phrases which committed him to nothing he could not afterwards evade by other circumlocations. But here was Anne, ready to blaze up again into another screaming fit. It would be better to placate her. "Well—yes," he said unwillingly. "Yes, of course, of course."

"Then you cannot *do* such a thing. A child needs its mother as a plant needs sunshine——"

"The subject is closed," said James. "I will listen to no more of this."

"Oh yes, you will," cried Anne. "I will give you no peace until I have my way——"

"Then, my love, the only thing left for me to do is to retire till you have thought things over," said James. He stooped to kiss her averted cheek and succeeded only in brushing the tip of an ear before she whisked away from him and flounced off to the far side of the room.

James did not follow her. He turned and went deliberately to the door, opened it, and went out without a backward glance.

And Anne, her face almost wizened in the intensity of its resentment, stood with her nails digging into the satin covering of a cushion, staring, without a word or movement, at the blank panels of the door which he had closed, so quietly, behind him.

scanned the sheet carefully. Had he left any loophole? No, as far as he could see, the letter, short as it was, covered everything. He signed and dated it, and folded it with a sigh. How much easier it would have been to give way to Anne's whim and have the boy brought up in his father's Household. But that he must not do: the Prince must not be sacrificed to the plaything. He melted the sweet-smelling wax in the candle-flame and knuckled it with his personal seal.

As he waited for it to set he looked round the room which held so many memories of his own youth. Would the place be friendly to his son? With a forefinger he explored the straggling "Jamie" which he had gouged, something like twenty years ago, out of the table top when he should have been writing a composition for Master Buchanan. He smiled at the thought of Henry taking his own knife and adding his name, perhaps bringing his own son, in the years ahead, to add a third name to the record of Scottish kings. He himself would come often to Stirling and watch his boy at work, sit beside him on the same bench, spell out the difficult phrases, help him over the same stiff passages of the old poets, perhaps read, one day, the first poems that the boy wrote himself.

James prised his ring up from the cold wax and took his letter downstairs; arrested, as he passed the bedchamber on the floor below, by the sound of furious bawling, and the hushing protests of women. It startled him to find after that hour in the old schoolroom that Henry was still in his swaddling clothes. Had he not been walking arm-in-arm with his full-grown son about his kingdom? And here he was, with his father so impatient, still in these women's smothering, coddling hands, not ready yet to be his father's friend. James shook his head, as if to get the buzzing of the nurses out of it, and went in

search of the Earl of Mar. What an unconscionable time children took to grow up.

But meanwhile he, the King, had work to do. While the Kirk considered themselves free to preach, not only doctrine, but treason and rebellion from their pulpits, and to deny the jurisdiction of the King in any of their affairs, he could hardly call himself ruler of his own kingdom. He was determined to put the matter on a proper footing, but with the patience which had always been so much older than his years, ready to take his time about it.

So the rest of the year passed without open hostility. James attended to lesser matters, laughing at the spirited defence put up by Sir Walter Scott, the Border laird of Buccleuch, when brought before the Council that summer to answer for the night rescue of the Borderer, Kinmont Willie, from Carlisle under the very nose of the harassed Lord Scrope, Commander of the Castle. The English Ambassador, stiff and prim with diplomatic correctness, maintained that not only William Armstrong of Kinmont but his rescuer should be handed over to Queen Elizabeth for punishment. But James, laughing still at the impudence of the Scottish escapade, refused. Like many cautious men, he had something amounting to veneration for physical courage, and the glance he threw on the tall laird of Buccleuch had both understanding and wistfulness in it. Once, once only, he too had ridden out by night on high and dangerous adventure, and warmed by Sir Walter's achievement his own, so long in ashes, seemed to glow again. So the English Ambassador was sent away, if not exactly with a flea in his ear, at least without any satisfaction.

James's first encounter with the ministers did not take place till the General Assembly of the Kirk met in September. During their proceedings it was agreed that the

royal expedition against the Catholic lords in the north had not been drastic enough to please the tough old campaigners of the Protestant faith. Were they, who had endured fire and persecution from the Catholics, to be content with a few scorched peels and cattle driven south to the King's pastures, while the heretics were left to come down from the mountains and re-roof their houses without even a hair of their heads singed?

The Assembly declared that it was scandalous: they arranged for a deputation to wait on the King at Falkland and tell him so. Many of the ministers were for strong measures, but their leaders shook their heads. Nothing was to be gained by violence: they must go meekly before the King, pointing out his errors in all charity and compassion, seeking not their own. In that spirit the deputation set out, and for a time the interview with the King round the Council table was a miracle of discretion and tolerance on both sides. But James had endured a good deal from the ministers and waited a long time for a chance to teach them a lesson. Peaceful methods seemed to have failed; the more he conceded, the more they demanded, and he interrupted the careful spokesman with a peremptory reminder that he was the King, and unaccustomed to having his authority called in question at his own Council table.

This was too much for Andrew Melville. Zeal conquered discretion: he was up on the instant, sweeping his milder nephew aside, positively plucking at James's sleeve to attract his attention.

"Who are you," asked James, "to interrupt your King?"

"And who are you, sir, but God's silly vassal?" shouted Andrew Melville. "I tell you——" he swept on in spite of James's uplifted hand and angry exclamation, "there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland; there is Christ Jesus and his kingdom the Kirk, whose subject

King James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom not a king, nor a head, nor a lord but a member. . . ." James, seeing that he was not to be checked without summoning a soldier to clap his hand over the minister's very mouth, let him run on. He even allowed himself to smile at so much vehemence, which as he had expected, made Andrew Melville angrier, till even his companions showed signs of anxiety to get him away before he should say anything for which the King might imprison them all. Weaker brethren fidgeted: there was a good deal of coughing, and a tendency to shuffle papers and glance towards the door. Freedom of speech in their own pulpits was one thing, but such language in the King's own Palace quite another. James surveyed them coldly and allowed their leader to rage on.

At last it was over. The great chamber was very still when the resonant voice no longer filled it. James did not speak at once, and when he did his voice was quieter than usual, even good-natured again, since it was not his habit to warn his intended victims before his plans were ready. He thanked the deputation and asked if anybody had anything further to say.

"I have said all that need be said now," answered Andrew Melville, glaring round the loyal but uneasy circle of his supporters.

"You have certainly said a good deal, Master Melville," James agreed mildly.

"I could say more——"

"Yes, yes, I have no doubt. But perhaps another time——"

"If I could feel that you, sir, would take my words to heart I would speak here daily," said Andrew Melville. "And offer the Lord very humble and hearty thanks for such an opportunity. But——"

"But it is, of course, just possible that the Lord has the



welfare of the King of Scotland as nearly at heart as that of its Kirk," observed James, rising. "And now, gentlemen, I am afraid that I cannot offer you more of my time. I thank you for your zeal, and commend to you the virtue of obedience—— No, no," for Andrew Melville showed signs of further eloquence, "I will hear you on that topic another time, but the lords of the Council are waiting for me now, and the affairs of the State cannot be set aside indefinitely even for those of the Kirk."

The deputation filed out. James took no steps against the ministers; his plans were not yet ripe and his family affairs were again claiming some of his attention. The birth of his daughter, Elizabeth, the English Queen's name-child, had done something to console Anne for the loss of Henry, and the domestic situation was better than it had been for some time. James was thankful for the respite, and hoped only that it might extend to national and religious affairs.

But that winter the ministers themselves precipitated a crisis. Anne, brought up as a Catholic, had never seen any reason to modify her creed for a pack of black-gowned preachers in Geneva bands, or to placate them by even outward conformity, and James, anxious to avoid friction in his home life whenever possible, had let Anne order the services in her Household as she pleased. Her dislike of the Protestant doctrine and her amusement at its preachers were common knowledge, and as a result, the Kirk, infuriated by her sly little jokes at which her ladies giggled at the expense of the ministers, returned her dislike with interest.

The trouble arose from the prayers for the Queen which custom and loyalty ordered to be included in the service of the Kirk. Of recent years, as the Queen's dislike of the Kirk became more evident, such petitions had been made with a very bad grace. At last, in

November, 1596, a certain Master Black devised an expedient which was presently to touch off the final conflagration.

"Good Lord," cried Master Black, looming over his meek but nervous congregation with eyes tight closed and hands clenched on the great Bible, "we must pray for the Queen for fashion's sake, but we have no cause, for she will never do us any good. O Lord, Thou knowest that we are in the midst of great tribulation, that we are as sheep without a shepherd, since all kings are no better than devil's bairns, and the Queen of England herself nothing but an atheist. . . . Hear us, good Lord, we beseech Thee, Thy faithful Kirk, who cry to Thee in this sorry state. . . ."

The English Ambassador, arriving on Monday morning to lodge a formal protest at the Palace, found James as angry as himself. Black was summoned before the Council. He refused to admit their authority. In the pulpit his utterances were subject only to the will of God, of which the Kirk, not James, was judge. The other ministers of Edinburgh supported their colleague, and thundered out their defiance to packed churches on the following Sunday. The Council proceeded with the trial of Master Black in his absence, since he had thought it wiser to maintain his doctrines in hiding. He was sentenced to banishment, but it was evident that he could scarcely be banished until he was found. Meanwhile, there were riots in Edinburgh. The Tolbooth, with the King and his Councillors in it, was surrounded by the congregations whom the ministers had incited to demonstration in favour of the freedom of the Kirk, while the craftsmen, with whom James was still popular, roused themselves in his defence.

"God and the Kirk!" shouted the congregations.

"God and the King," yelled the craftsmen who flapped

to the encounter still in their leather aprons, hastily jamming steel caps on their heads and spitting on their palms as they gripped the heaviest tools of their trades, snatched sword or stave from behind their doors and came howling up the High Street. Thanks to their help James escaped from the Tolbooth and hurried back to Holyrood. The time had come to act, and all that night lights burned in the State apartments, where preparations for sudden departure were being made. Early next morning the King and all the Court left Holyroodhouse for Linlithgow, and a herald read a certain proclamation from the Mercat Cross. His Majesty the King, he declared, had lost patience with the Kirk and citizens. After yesterday's disgraceful incidents he had decided that the city was no longer fit to be the capital of Scotland. So he had withdrawn his Court from it. The Courts of Justice, too, would no longer sit there, and the nobility were commanded to leave the city, with all officials and strangers, as a punishment for the treasonable behaviour of the ministers of the Kirk.

The sensation was instantaneous. All the good citizens of Edinburgh were appalled, for to deprive the city of its privileges as the capital and all its most important bodies was to strike such a blow at trade and public life as would deprive its people of the best part of their livelihood.

Andrew Haliburton expressed the general opinion when he said that to attend the Kirk and support its ministers were one thing, but to let them bring a man down to destitution was quite another. The ministers found themselves cold-shouldered, deserted, even mobbed in the streets. They did what they could, declaring that the King, who had always been possessed of a devil, had now been entered by seven, that it was therefore lawful to rebel against him in the name of Christ's Kirk. After all, declared the ministers, they could anoint as many

kings as need be, but the people could not do without their Kirk. It was all useless. Rumours flicked to and fro about the terrified city; the people no longer listened to its ministers but fled from them instead, leaving them to harangue empty churches. The King was gathering an army from the Highlands and the Borders: he meant to sack the city: there would be a massacre: no man was safe. The Kirk had led them into this trouble, it was only reasonable that it should get them out. Enthusiasts, shouting to the crowds from the steps of the Mercat Cross, suggested that the ministers should be bound and handed over to the King as hostages for the city's freedom. Martyrdom of this kind did not appeal to those concerned. They left Edinburgh in a hurry, and the city's officials, after anxious conference, decided to submit unconditionally to the King's terms. On the first of January, 1597, James rode back to a chastened city.

He lost no time in making his terms public. They included a fine of 30,000 Scottish merks as a penalty for the recent tumults, and ordered every minister, whether he had been concerned in the recent demonstrations or not, to submit to the King's authority over all civil or criminal causes on pain of losing his stipend. Political preaching was forbidden, and James was reported to have said in Council that he would hang the first minister to speak against the King. Further, the Crown assumed the right of convening a General Assembly, and declared that no Church court might meet without royal sanction. For the time being James considered this to be enough. And the Kirk, accepting these conditions as in its isolated state it must, knew that for the time being at least the King had broken them.

There was darkness in Israel, cried the ministers, and there was darkness also in Edinburgh on the day of the total eclipse of the sun in February, a phenomenon which

terrorised the population into a frightful uncertainty whether the Lord were punishing the ministers or expressing his wrath with the King. During the slow, strange period of twilight the work of the whole city was at a standstill. Craftsmen came out of their booths with their tools still in their hands, women with their dish-clouts, soldiers with drawn dirks. Men fell on their knees where they stood, women covered their faces, children bawled unheeded as the sulphurous shadow engulfed the Castle on the rock and the houses on the slope below. Birds rose from the dark edges of the Nor' Loch and streamed wildly across the sky. As the darkness deepened the streets were full of cries and prayers, and simple people looking fearfully upward for the wrath of God found the sky full of stars.

In his room at Holyroodhouse James rubbed his hands and called for candles. He was not concerned with the death of the sun, though he thought it might usefully scare the people. He had been in correspondence with the astronomer Tycho Brahe, whom he had met years ago in Denmark, and it was interesting to see his forecast so accurately fulfilled. "It will pass," he told his shaking servants. And the oracular word went round the Palace and out into the crowded, murky streets. "The King says it will pass. . . ." Another oracle challenged the diminished Kirk; and as the light began to grow again men went about their work with a new respect for the unpretentious figure of the King.

And James, extinguishing his candles, went on with one of his frequent letters to Cecil. He was pleased with his prospects. Slowly did it. He must make a note to include the virtue of patience in his list of the qualities of kingship. If one had not valour, or beauty, or eloquence, one might still do very nicely, it seemed, if one knew how to wait. The kingdom of

Scotland was now his, and he was free to turn his attention to that greater kingdom on which he had always set his heart, and which he had been unable to contemplate with any confidence while his subjects still resisted his authority at home. But now he could conduct his correspondence with the hunchback Cecil and the other English lords who wrote to him in their careful cipher with the complacency of a man who has shown himself master in his own house and afterwards strolls to his front porch to have a word with his admiring neighbours.

But James had long ago learned to put no faith in promises: his spies went up and down England to discover the true state of affairs, while he himself negotiated for various European alliances which might serve him if England failed. He even suggested his young Henry as a husband for the Spanish Infanta (another claimant fancied nearly as strongly as himself in some quarters for the English throne). There was no harm, he felt, in making things as safe as possible.

And now, at last, there was time for literary activities. The *Daemonology* had come out shortly after the Edinburgh triumph, and James was already busy on its successor, the book on kingship which was to be waiting for Henry as soon as he could read. He wrote, as he explained, as if on oath, and there the violence of the feelings against the ministers which he had suppressed for so long came out at last.

"I protest before the great God," wrote James, with strokes which made the quill shriek, "and since I am here as on my Testament, it is no place for me to lie in—that you shall never find with any Highland or Border thieves greater ingratitude, and more lies and vile perjuries, than with these fanatic spirits." Henry should know what his father had had to suffer before he could give him control of his Kirk.

But there was more to do. Huntly and the other Catholic lords had slipped back into the kingdom under cover of the flurry with the Kirk, presenting a humble petition to the King for permission to administer their estates again. James agreed, but again he dictated his terms. He was no longer afraid of Huntly and the tales he might bear to the Queen: his relationship with Anne was not now the first thing in his life, and even the publication of that old story could hardly make matters worse than they were. For fundamental indifference now underlay public courtesy and left husband and wife with hardly a word to say to each other when they were alone. Appearances must be maintained, and so the mask of happy family life was held bravely before the world. But behind it Anne's smiling lips sneered, and James's were pressed into a bloodless line: her eyes mocked and roved, while his watched ceaselessly for any behaviour which might be unseemly for the future Queen of England and the mother of his son.

Huntly could say what he liked. The mask would be held before the world in spite of him, and what went on behind it interested James no longer. So his terms were harsh. The Catholics might return, but they must leave their creed behind them. James wrote to Huntly that he would not have a contrary religion in his kingdom; they must change or go landless.

They gave way, and the Kirk, slightly mollified, received their submission. Bothwell, too, decided that his cousin's successes seemed likely to make the country too hot to hold him, and set up house in France. James heard of this with interest. The tide had turned indeed, if Francis knew it. He wrote complacent notes for young Henry's *Basilikon Doron* on the divine right of kings, and made Anne handsome presents on the anniversary of their first meeting, for which he had to borrow

considerable sums from various people, among them the young Earl of Gowrie, back from Padua with all the graces of a European education, but less often to be seen at Court than his enchanting younger brother Alexander, the twenty-year old Master of Ruthven.

Things seemed remarkably peaceful after the defeat of the Kirk. It was a new sensation for James to have time to spare for his writing, and he made good use of it. In 1598 he completed an ambitious treatise on *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, a sort of cock-crow for recent achievements, and during 1599 he finished *Basilikon Doron*. In that year, too, he brought about a reform which had been in his mind for some time. Why, in the name of all oddity, should the New Year begin on the 25th of March? After a stubborn conservative opposition, even in his own Council, he managed to carry his project, and arrange for the seventeenth century to begin in Scotland on January 1st, 1600 (though even then various logical people objected exasperatingly that it would not properly begin till 1601). In either case, James determined to take that summer as a holiday, and to spend a large part of it getting to know his son.

The Queen's household moved as usual from Holyrood to the summer palace of Falkland, and there, after being detained over various affairs, James was to join them later for a few days hunting on his way to visit Henry in Stirling Castle. He had been looking forward to his stay at Falkland, which had always been one of his favourite palaces, just far enough from Edinburgh for him to feel that he had left business behind, near enough to be reached in a few hours by a man on a swift horse in case of emergency.

Anne and her ladies were finding the summer specially pleasant at Falkland. For one thing, the weather had been as rare and gentle as it can occasionally



be in Scotland, where it is more often disappointing. In the gardens every fruit tree was exquisitely clotted with white or sunrise-tinted blossom, and along the lichened southern aspects of the crumbling old walls even the newly installed quinces and apricots put out fresh shoots and sprays.

The absence of the King and the great lords made the day's routine much less formal. Anne and her ladies were only too thankful to have no state functions to keep them sweltering indoors in stuffy, ceremonial clothes. Meals might be eaten, now and then, under the shade of the great limes, scented as the summer went superbly on, with their dangling flowers, and drowsy with the bumbling bees they drew there. Life at Falkland, during these weeks, became something of a picnic, and Anne, lazy with pregnancy, felt that life in Scotland was a warm and pleasant business, infinitely more attractive than usual.

Her ten years in Scotland had turned her from a wild, long-legged girl into a fine young woman, with a certain amount of acquired dignity which still tended to disappear in private life, for she was too gay to enjoy being a figure-head and too impulsive to keep her admirers at a distance. She had grown taller since she came to Scotland, and as she strolled along the box-bordered paths between the smooth lawns of the Palace Gardens one morning in early July, her slim figure in its billowing summer silks was apparently unchanged by the child she carried. Beatrice Ruthven was with her, holding a little rush basket in which some loyal husbandman had presented his earliest strawberries to the Queen. The two young women were exchanging confidences as their heads came together in pretty greed over the basket of fruit.

"And so Alexander said——" Beatrice Ruthven whispered the rest into the Queen's ear.

Anne giggled. "You are making that up," she said, as she bit a strawberry in half.

"Indeed, Madam, I am not. He would die for your Majesty. . . ."

"Hush, you must not say such things aloud," said the Queen nervously, with a glance over her shoulder. "If the King should hear of it——"

"How should he, Madam, as far away as Holyrood?"

"He has spies," said Anne, with a little shiver. "I think he watches me—always. It frightens me, Beatrice. His eyes are so cold——"

"But all the country knows that he is utterly devoted to you, Madam," cried Beatrice. "Look at the gifts he chooses for you—and his letters—and his concern for your health. Why, he insisted that you should go to Falkland before him in order that this important summer should be spent in country air——"

"For whose sake?" asked Anne, with a bitter little twist to her full mouth. "Mine—or the child's?"

"For both, Madam, surely."

"Well, let it go at that. Let us forget unpleasant subjects. Tell me about Alexander. Why did he never come near me all yesterday when he knew very well that I longed to hear him play those new Italian airs on his lute?"

"He *said* the lute had gone to be re-strung," smiled Beatrice.

"And what was the real reason?"

"He was afraid that your Majesty was displeased—he had been too bold in the rose alley the night before—it was the moon, he said—which made your beauty something so rare——"

"I can still feel his lips," Anne murmured, her head tilted a little back, her eyes half closed. Beatrice Ruthven watched her eagerly. "Then I may tell him——?"

"That he is forgiven? I am not sure. Perhaps I will tell him myself."

"Soon, Madam? The poor boy is in a state——"

"That will do him no harm," said Anne, with a little gurgle of laughter. "I will see, Beatrice, I will see. Say nothing. Where is he now?"

"Within ten yards of you," whispered Beatrice.

Anne looked round her in astonishment, then her mouth curved into a mischievous smile as she caught sight of young Alexander, fresh from the tennis court, the neck of his silk shirt undone and his doublet flung loosely round his shoulders as he sprawled, sound asleep, his back against a young chestnut, which patterned the ground round him with fantastic light and shade. The two young women tiptoed towards him. Anne took another strawberry from her basket and nibbled at it as she stood there, looking down at the boy's flushed face and damply curling hair, while the scarlet juice of the fruit ran over her fingers and a couple of drops fell on her gown.

Then, with a sudden movement she twitched a silver ribbon from her neck, and stooped to pass it lightly round that of Alexander Ruthven, who still lay in a stupor which seemed hardly natural while Anne and Beatrice, laughing at each other, backed softly away across the grass, and ran indoors.

"We will see how long he takes to wake up," said Anne as they went upstairs. "The window of my boudoir looks out on the garden, Beatrice. Go there and watch while I bathe my face in rose-water. An insect has stung it."

"Let me do it, Madam."

"No, no, go to the window. I must know what Alexander does——"

Beatrice ran to the casement. By craning out, she could see her brother, asleep still, it seemed, his head

lolling forward and his back against the trunk. But she saw something else, something which made her grip the edge of the sill, white faced. A group of gentlemen, all in riding clothes, were coming slowly along the path which led from the stables, and among them, hatless and smiling, walked the King.

"What is it?" Anne's voice was frightened.

"Nothing. Only—the King——"

"He is here?"

"In the garden. Walking down the path towards Alexander—why, Madam——" Anne was beside her, trembling. They clung together, staring out of the window, while the boy under the tree lay still and the gentlemen approached him with maddening slowness, chatting and laughing as they came.

"He—must—not see that—ribbon," said Anne in a high, frightened voice.

"But surely he could not know——"

"*Idiot—he gave it me,*" whispered the Queen between chattering teeth.

Beatrice Ruthven was not slow-witted. Before Anne had finished her sentence she was across the room and running along the corridor and down the steps. But as soon as she reached the garden she knew it was too late. Hiding behind a flowering syringa she watched the Duke of Lennox say something to the King, saw him point and grin at the sight of the sleeping boy, saw the smile wiped suddenly from the King's face as he stooped and looked closely at the ribbon round Alexander Ruthven's neck.

Beatrice, her hands over her mouth, peeped out from behind her bush, praying that Alexander might not wake now, that the King would pass on, that she could think of some way of averting the calamity foretold by the King's threatening looks. If only Alexander would lie still. . . .

But Alexander had not, as it happened, been asleep at all. He had seen the King's approach out of one half-shut eye, and considered it diplomatic to stay where he was. The King was evidently displeased, so perhaps the less he, Alexander, knew about the Queen's little jokes the better. And after a long pause, during which Alexander did his best to breathe naturally and wondered what would happen if the King struck him, he heard the party move off at last. His first deep breath was rudely interrupted by the whirlwind arrival of his sister, who tweaked the ribbon roughly from his neck and fled off with it round the corner of the box hedge.

"Here . . ." said young Alexander, sitting up indignantly, "What in the world . . ." But he could still see the slowly moving group of courtiers lounging towards the side door of the Palace, and something ominous in the King's bearing suggested that it might be advisable to disappear. He rose quietly, shrugging his sleeves into his doublet as he made for the stables. He would be safer, he fancied, once he was away from Falkland.

Beatrice, scarlet-cheeked and breathless, scurried along the twisting paths into the Palace, up the stairs into the Queen's boudoir and flung the silver ribbon into a drawer.

"Let me be doing your hair," she gasped. "Sit down, Madam. I hear steps outside."

James plodded up the stairs which led to the Queen's rooms, his face stern and his mind busy with that picture of the Master of Ruthven, his clothes disordered, and round his neck a silver ribbon, surely a ribbon he remembered, marred by a scarlet stain.

He opened the door of his wife's boudoir without ceremony. She was sitting in front of her looking-glass, rubbing her hands with some scented ointment while one of her Maids of Honour combed out her long hair. Both

women started at the sight of him, he noticed grimly, and Anne swung round on her stool.

"Why, James—you *never* told me you were coming to-day! You gave me such a surprise."

"A pleasant surprise, I hope," said James, looking round him. On a little table stood a half-empty basket of strawberries. He strolled across to it and took one.

"The first of the season," said Anne a little breathlessly. "They were sent in an hour ago."

"Were they?" grunted James. He crushed the fruit against his teeth, and looked down at his stained fingertips. They were the same colour as the mark on that ribbon, as the spots on the front of his wife's white gown. He spoke deliberately, but still with laborious good humour: "By the way, Anne, where is that ribbon I gave you at New Year?"

"A *ribbon*, James? What ribbon?"

"Tuts, my dear, you know very well. It was a trifle, but an expensive one. The tassels were jewelled—the ribbon silver—is it here or have you—lost it?"

"Lost it? Certainly not. I do not lose your gifts," said Anne with the happy emphasis of conscious safety. "It is somewhere here. In this drawer——" she pulled one out. "Or that—yes—here it is. You see, James? It has not been out of its box since yesterday."

"Give it to me" said James.

She handed him the ribbon. His hands as they touched hers were deadly cold.

James slowly unrolled the length of silver ribbon. Near one of the tassels was a small scarlet strawberry stain.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

FREDERICK HENRY, Lord of the Isles, Duke of Rothesay, and all the rest, stooped down and gripped the edge of the sheepskin rug on which two other boys were standing. With a sharp tug he drew it from under them and went over backwards himself in a gale of laughter. There was a scuffle and a yelp or two; Henry let out with two firm fists at a freckled face which appeared above him and accepted a rattling jab on the jaw with a shake of the head and a philosophic grunt as he kicked out at the enveloping rug with all the strength of his sturdy little thighs. Dust rose and hovered, benches reeled, even the solid schoolroom table shuddered at the impact of half a dozen young bodies as Henry's companions flung themselves into the excellent fight which the heir to the throne had organised in the absence of their tutor. They would almost certainly be caught; but what did that matter? If inquiries were made young Henry would take his share of the blame, and more, if necessary. He always did. And it was fair enough, for their tutors could not birch a prince with the same zest and accuracy as they would have birched the mere sons of the nobility.

So it was several minutes before one of the combatants, struggling to free his hair from the weight of some one else who was standing on it, noticed that the door of the schoolroom had opened. The next instant he was struggling to his feet, dragging his companions apart by whatever he could reach, more terrified by the silence of that spectator than by all the anticipated rage of their absent tutor.

"Andrew . . . Sandy . . . Rob . . . come away; I tell you. Stop now, stop . . . it's the King. . . ."

Henry regretfully unclamped his teeth from an adjacent forearm and allowed himself to be dragged to his feet by his companions, who showed a terrorised alacrity in dusting him down and thrusting him forward while they themselves retreated as far as the walls would let them and assumed expressions which indicated that they were not there at all, or, if they were, it was only by the strangest accident.

Henry stood alone in the middle of the scuffled rushes, the corner of the rug still in his hand, facing his father with a sort of reluctant courage, while the dust slowly settled round him and James said never a word. It was Henry who moved forward at last, his face dust-smeared and crimson, his expression downcast. He bowed and stood silent, waiting for his father to speak first as custom dictated.

But when James spoke it was to the other boys. "You may go," he said, with a jerk of his head towards the door. They fled like shadows, shutting the door carefully behind them. Henry, facing his father, listened forlornly to the dying sound of their hasty footsteps as they put the length of the corridor between them and the King.

James continued to stare at his son. At last Henry could bear it no longer. He was a gay and healthy child, untroubled by too much imagination, but these interviews with his father, who would sometimes brood over him as if he were trying to turn his very soul inside out, did tend to give him the creeps. He broke the rule. "I hope your Majesty is well?" he said in a voice which did not actually shake.

His father seemed to rouse himself. He looked, even Henry knew, worse than usual, as if he had not slept for



a week, with new creases round his mouth and darker hollows round his eyes, which dwelt on Henry in the way the hounds' eyes sometimes did when they were old and did not know what was the matter with them. But his father wasn't old: his hair wasn't grey. It could not be that.

James held out his hand and Henry took it with a little shiver of embarrassment as he allowed himself to be led to the window. There his father stood silent again, looking first at the shining river which twisted far away below them and then back at Henry as if to make sure that he was still there. So it was going to be one of *those* interviews. Henry sighed. He had been afraid of it ever since his father had appeared in the doorway like that. Another time he would have laughed and perhaps have given a gold piece to the boy who had come off best in the fight, and then another privately to Henry after the boys had gone. But he seemed to be in the sort of mood when Henry was "the only thing I care for in the world," and "My son, you don't know what you mean to me . . . we must be everything to each other, you and I."

Henry knew the signs, and he dreaded these moods more than he could, at less than seven years old, find words to express. They were times when his father seemed to shift the whole weight of a man's tragic experience on to his inexperienced shoulders, heavy as death, more terrible than anything in his short life. At first Henry had not connected the awful depression which followed some of his father's visits with his father, for he could at other times be such a fine companion, laughing as they rode together, showing him how to stalk game, to cut up a carcase, to take aim at a quarry. He thought that the depression must mean that he himself had done something wrong, and so he went burdened

with the knowledge of his father's unhappiness as with a weight of guilt.

But lately, he had begun to resent the burden. Why should he have to listen to the long stories of his father's troubles? Other people didn't. Discreet questioning proved that neither Sandy, nor Rob or Wat or any of the others had to endure such interviews, that their fathers, if they talked to them at all, gave commands and did not ask their sons if they loved them, as his father was apt to do, with Henry's head held in between his dry, twitching hands and his voice broken in the way which made Henry at first want to cry and then to run away very fast and never come back.

Henry looked out of the window too and saw a seagull beating up against the wind. He wished he were that bird. If he had wings . . .

"Well, Henry," said James at last. "And have you been reading the books I sent you?"

"Er—I have looked at them, sir," said Henry. "The words are difficult, though. I cannot read the long ones yet. But the white covers are very fine. The others all said——"

"That is vellum," interrupted James. "Did you find your name engraved on the spines in gold?"

"Yes, sir. I showed it to them all," said Henry proudly.

"I wonder if any of them guess how much you mean to me, my boy," said James.

Henry shifted his shoulders uncomfortably. He had hoped they were not going to have that sort of a talk after all. But here it was.

"You see, my son," James went on, "it is not easy to be a king. I have learned, I hope, a little, and I want you to start off with all my knowledge, so that you will not have to suffer, as I have suffered to gain it. I would give all I have to save you from suffering, Henry. You are

the dearest thing in the world. . . . I wonder if you know the depth of the love I have for you . . . Henry . . . ?”

Henry fixed his mind desperately on the hovering seagull. It was going to pass under the bridge—no—it had circled and swung up over the parapet—it was perching—it was sharpening its beak on the stone. . .

“——never be so utterly alone as I have been. Even your mother does not understand. She cares so much for pleasure and admiration that she can spare no thought for me. I am her husband, I made her Queen, surely I have the right to some consideration. . . .”

Henry bit his lip. If only the seagull would fly again. When it just sat there, balancing a little to the wind, it could not keep out his father’s voice. His father was telling him how unhappy he was: he was sorry that his father was so unhappy, but he didn’t want to be made unhappy too. Why *should* he be made unhappy? They had been having such fun, he and the rest, with that rug; it had been one of those blue days when you wanted to shout, and now it was all spoilt and heavy and grey.

“——not only for my own sake, but for the sake of the kingdom. It is not suitable that the King of Scotland should be treated like that. What do you think, Henry? Tell me what you think. I’m asking your advice, as man to man. I must put a stop to it, for the sake of your inheritance as well as for my own dignity. Don’t you agree?”

“Yes,” gasped Henry. The seagull had spread its wings; if only he could spread his arms like that, and soar, right away from Stirling, how surprised his father would be. And then he would circle round the Nether Garden where the others were and drop something on Sandy’s head, as seagulls did. And then he would soar up and away, to the sea . . . to the strange countries his tutor told him about where men were black. . . .

"I have thought of nothing else, these days," said James, "and my mind is made up. But I had to come and discuss it with my son, I had to explain how I have been treated. Of course I knew it was a lie, as soon as I saw the same mark on the silver ribbon. But I said nothing. Oh no, that would have been too easy. They would have won me over with tears and entreaties. No, I gave her back the ribbon without a word. I saw them look at each other: they were saying how simple it had been, how easily I was deceived. I let them think so. I went away, the poor, simple husband who trusts his wife. It is better to let people think they have deceived you, Henry. It makes them confident and while they think themselves secure you can strike——"

Henry looked up at his father's face. It was contorted with an expression he had never seen before, teeth bared, eyes wide and staring, tongue lolling a little from the corner of the pale-lipped mouth between the thickets of moustache and beard. He could not bear it. His father must have gone mad. His own face quivered, he tried to wrench his hand free, found it gripped inexorably by a hand that drew him towards that ghastly face while the other arm lifted him off the ground . . . he gave a tremendous roar of terror and pushed himself away with both hands on his father's chest.

"Why . . . boy . . . what's the matter?" James's face changed again like that of a man coming out of a trance. Henry, sobbing and struggling, found it turning into the face he knew, even into the smiling face he liked. He stopped struggling, bewildered.

"I was only joking," said James hurriedly. "I didn't mean to frighten you, no, no, that is all past. Forget it. We will forget all that, won't we now?"

Henry nodded doubtfully.

"Look, we will ask for a holiday, and ride out together

into the country. You shall follow the hunt with me instead of sitting here with your books. Will you like that?"

"Yes—can Sandy come too?" asked Henry.

James's smile wavered. "Why, yes, I suppose he can if you like. But I had thought we would ride together, father and son, with the hounds in front and the wind behind. You can ride with Sandy every day. Surely you would like to ride with me when I have come all the way from Falkland to see you?"

"Yes, father," said Henry.

"Then that is settled. Go and tell them to change your clothes. While you are away I will attend to some urgent matters—tell them to have a man ready to take some despatches discreetly to the Gowrie House in Perth. There is paper here."

He turned to the table and strode across the bench. Immediately in front of him was his own name, gouged out so long ago. Henry had not yet cut his underneath. He would have expected the boy to think of that for himself. "Why don't you put your name there, below mine?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know," said Henry uncomfortably.

"You should be proud to be my son, you know. I will make you a great king," said James, his voice pompous again as he unknowingly defied the fate which was to cut short his son's life so soon, as fate seems, now and then, to take away those things too dearly loved. "You will rule Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales. I am building up this kingdom of mine to be your inheritance, another royal gift which I can make my son—" The yearning note had come back into his voice. Henry's soft mouth took on a stubborn line.

"I will go and tell them about the messenger," he said. He could bear no more.

James rode with his son that afternoon and spent the night at Stirling, awake in the room with the gold and crimson bed which, long ago, had been his mother's, a rich luxury brought out of France to take the edge off the bitter northern nights with its encircling tent of gorgeous curtains. Now the glory had been obscured by more than thirty years of dust, but James did not notice its shabbiness. He lay in the big dark room, still warmly reeking of carelessly snuffed candles, counting the stars which swung outside the narrow windows as he completed his plans.

The next morning he rode back to Falkland, invigorated rather than exhausted by his sleepless night. For as he worked out the details of his next few days' programme, his very blood had seemed to run more strongly, pulse more defiantly. He had reason, once again, to thank the men who had taught him to scheme and be secret, to mask his purpose under the harmless buffoonery of a man who was below, rather than above suspicion.

Even cold daylight revealed no defects in the plan which was to close, once and for all, his score against the Ruthven family; a score which began long ago, beyond conscious memory, echoing into his subconscious with his mother's far-off voice from the night the Italian died. James had never heard that cry, but the sense of it must have throbbed into his body with the life she gave it: "*Before God, my lord Ruthven, I bear that in my belly which will one day avenge these cruelties and affronts . . .*" The next entry was against William Ruthven, who had robbed him of Esmé Stuart; a long-healed scar stirred and throbbed again at the memory. Next came that Countess of Gowrie's daughter, Lady Atholl, who had brought Bothwell to Holyrood; Beatrice Ruthven, who had urged Anne to admire young Moray's beauty; John Ruthven, the present Earl, to whom he owed so

much money. Last of all came Alexander. What was Alexander to his wife?

James spent a day at Falkland on his return from Stirling, making himself pleasant to Anne, giving her good news of Henry, arranging for a hunting party in the woods near Perth. He went to bed early that night in great good humour, for which Anne was thankful. She thought she knew James: the incident of the ribbon had mercifully blown over. But what a moment! She must give Beatrice a thank-offering for her heaven-sent presence of mind.

She slept better, that night, than she had done for long enough: the summer air came sweetly through the open casements, scented with honeysuckle and pricked with the country sounds of night birds and horses stamping in their stables. She only half noticed when James rose earlier than usual, even for hunting, the next morning and set out, with a passing pat, for the courtyard.

Down below the voices of men saddling horses in the early sunshine rose with the crisp scent of steaks being grilled for an early breakfast. Anne fancied, as she lay there with her eyes half shut, that she heard Alexander's voice . . . talking to James. But that must be nonsense; for surely Alexander was in Perth. Should she get up and look . . . or should she stay where she was? Before she could make up her mind the voices had subsided under the clatter of horses being led out of the yard. Anne stretched her arms above her head, turned over with a little yawn and was immediately asleep, while the royal party rode off, with the Duke of Lennox, the Earl of Mar, Alexander Ruthven (recalled by James's summons) and a score of other gentlemen in attendance on the King.

They killed at eleven, a few miles from Perth. James made a point of talking to Alexander as they rode, and

Alexander, a little puzzled, and definitely apprehensive, was surprised to hear the King say that he intended to visit his brother Gowrie in his house at Perth. "Privately," added James. "It is over the matter of my debt."

"Indeed," said Alexander in amazement. For his brother had grumbled only a few days since that he might as well write off the eighty thousand crowns the King had had from him as lost.

"Yes," said James, who was not thinking of money. "Your brother will be glad to see me, I should think."

"Why—yes—your Majesty," said the uncomfortable Alexander. If he allowed the King to come to Gowrie House and then borrow further, he would never hear the end of it. On the other hand, it was just possible that the old skinflint might really intend to pay, and he ought not to lose the chance. Besides, he could hardly refuse point-blank to entertain him. They must just take the risk.

James let the reins lie on his horse's neck as they rode through the hazel-latticed copse between sunlight and shadow. Rabbits scuttered across the ride in front of them and he smiled at Alexander.

"A word in your ear: I have more than one debt to pay (true enough: true enough. It was amusing to use truth as mortally as falsehood) and so this visit must be kept secret. It would not please Master Geordie Heriot to know that I had paid your brother's score before I had asked for his."

"No, of course not," said the increasingly astonished Alexander. Did not every one say that the King cared nothing for his nobles' rights as long as he could keep on the soft side of the common people? What reformation was this?

"So I must invent some story to account for it, and keep me out of trouble with my other creditors. Any-



thing will do: what shall we say brought me? An ancient manuscript——”

“We have some fine manuscripts,” admitted Alexander.

“Yes, yes, but I would like something more out of the way, rare enough to take me from the hunt on a fine summer morning. Let me see now . . . let it be treasure trove. Every one knows that I am as fond of gold as the next man, do they not, Mr. Alexander?” He grinned slyly at the embarrassed young man by his side.

“Why—well—that is to say——”

“I know it well enough. Let it pass. The treasure trove will do. We’ll make it sound interesting, Mr. Alexander. A pot of gold has been found on your land . . . foreign gold . . . no doubt smuggled into the country by the Jesuits to help the Catholic cause . . . does that not sound likely?”

“Not very,” said the Master truthfully.

“Tuts, man, what’s the odds,” said James. “The more unlikely, the more to make a man inquisitive. We want to put them off the scent on which we’re really running. I will tell Lennox and perhaps Mar about this gold, but never a word of the debt I’ve come to pay, mind. Never a word, except to Gowrie yonder.”

“As you wish, your Majesty,” said Alexander Ruthven.

James reined his horse back and went off to speak to Lennox, who was not impressed by the story. He was a young man of much common sense and his experience of hidden pots of gold was as limited as most people’s. He thought it sounded like a fairy tale, and said so. James whispered that he was not sure himself whether to believe it, but it would do no harm, anyway, to go and find out.

What about the possibility of treason, objected Lennox, as James had intended that he should. James fingered his beard and gave a good imitation of a man torn between

greed and caution. Surely it was a pity to lose the chance of treasure trove? And after all, he was well defended. Lennox and Mar must hold themselves ready to act on the least alarm. And if reinforcements were needed, he happened to know that Tullibardine had a loyal force of a hundred men or so exercising in the district. He thought that they were sufficiently ensured against emergencies, so long as Lennox and Mar were warned.

Then James rode back to the Master, while Lennox uneasily passed the word round that his Majesty had business at Gowrie House, and he did not like the look of it. They were to hold themselves ready to act immediately if anything went wrong. James, meanwhile, advised the Master to lend as much colour to the pot of gold legend as he could. Let him send a man forward to warn the Earl of Gowrie that the King and his gentlemen wished to take their midday meal with him, hinting at some interesting business afterwards. Alexander, his conscience not quite at ease from memory of the incident in the garden, did what he was told. The King seemed in the best of tempers, but if he were to cross him, this pleasant state of things might not last.

What happened to the messenger was not, afterwards, quite clear. The Earl apparently never got the message, for he was more surprised than pleased to see the King and his company appear just as he was finishing a solitary meal, and he kept the royal party waiting an unconscionable time for theirs. He did not seem to be any more convinced by his version of the story than Lennox had been by his. It was, he thought, even less likely that the King intended to pay the eighty thousand crowns he owed than that a pot of gold coins had been discovered on the Gowrie estate.

He was gloomily convinced that the King was probably there for no other purpose than to borrow again, and he

had already sunk more than he could well spare down that shaft. So he was as sulky as he dared while James waited for a suitable dinner to be produced by the cursing major domo and his flustered underlings. If his Majesty thought he welcomed the privilege of being eaten out of house and home as a preliminary to being offered the opportunity of parting with a few more thousands he was very greatly mistaken.

But James was in great spirits when he was at last given his dinner, waited upon by the Earl himself in a private room away from his suite. He enjoyed his meal, clapped the Earl on the shoulder and asked him what the matter was: here was a poor reception! Why did the Earl not go and drink with the lords who were dining in the Hall? Yes, he should go and drink his King's health while he, James, went upstairs with the Master. He had heard of some manuscripts which were not shown to every comer, and he owned to being curious. The Ruthven skill in necromancy was well known; but his own interest in the subject was purely academic. The Earl need not be afraid, he added with a nudging elbow, that his secrets would be given away.

The Earl noticed that there was still no mention of repayment of debts. But on the other hand, there had been no talk of further borrowing either, which was always something. He agreed that they had a few papers, but doubted whether there was much to interest the King. What there was, of course, he might see with pleasure. Perhaps his Majesty would follow his brother to the private rooms at the end of the great gallery where valuable books and curiosities were kept under lock and key. Meanwhile he would go and entertain the lords assembled in the Hall.

Alexander escorted James upstairs. They pattered along the gallery, where James showed considerable interest in

the portraits but no special haste to inspect the manuscripts kept in the turret; on the contrary, he seemed to enjoy the delay, as if there was something specially pleasant in anticipation. The Master noticed that the King looked at him oddly, and ran his tongue along his lower lip from time to time, smiling as if at some private joke, as Alexander led the way to the private rooms, locking the doors again behind them.

The lords below soon finished their meal and went into the garden: a rumour had been raised that the King had decided not to stay . . . that he had already gone . . . nobody knew where or why. They stood about in groups, asking questions which nobody answered. The porter did not know; but he declared that nobody could have left the premises without his knowledge, for the keys of all the gates were hanging on his belt.

The Earl of Gowrie offered to go and find out: the lords dawdled round to the courtyard, where the porter's little hutch guarded the arched gateway to the street. Gowrie had gone out into the highway; the lords were waiting for him to return. Above them loomed the windows of the great gallery, and a certain turret, deep in twisted ivy stems, from which, above the hubbub of discussion, a harsh, familiar voice was suddenly heard shouting in breathless terror. "Treason . . . treason . . . help . . . my lord Mar. . . !"

A score of heads jerked back, fingers pointed, swords grated from their sheaths. In the window of the turret the convulsed face of James was framed for long enough to add, "They are murdering me," before a hand was seen to come across his mouth, and he was pulled struggling and crimson-cheeked from the window back to the room behind.

But Lennox, Mar and the rest were already charging across the courtyard, up the main stairs, along the gallery,

and hammering madly against the double doors which led from the gallery to the family's private rooms in the turret, which, as Alexander had explained, were always kept locked. They were locked now: the lords sent men flying for hammers and ladders to batter with while they thundered on them meanwhile with the hilts of their swords, howling threats to the Ruthvens supposed to be within. But young Ramsay, James's page, had found a quicker way. He did not follow the others, but took the twisting turret stair known as the Black Turnpike which one of the Gowrie pages had spoken of earlier in the day as a useful exit on private affairs. Doubling up the narrow spiral with his sword drawn, he burst into the study through a hidden door, and found the King and the Master wrestling to and fro among overturned furniture, spilt ink and strewn papers. The Master's weapon was still in its sheath, and he was on his knees while James stooped over him, but he still retained his despairing grip on James's neck and his hand was over James's mouth as if at all costs he must check that wild outcry of murder and treason until things could be explained.

For Ramsay, blazing into the midst of the struggle with a drawn sword, the sight of the reeling figures was enough, but James did not risk an instant's hesitation. "Strike low," he shouted. "He has on a secret doublet."

Ramsay struck, wildly, at Alexander's chest. The blow went wide, bit into the boy's neck. Coughing and bleeding, his grip on James relaxed; and James pushed him thankfully towards the door which led into the Turnpike, while Ramsay bawled directions from the window to some of the King's men who still stood gaping in the courtyard, not knowing where to run. But now they came thundering up the twisting stairs yelling "Treason" like the rest. Half-way up they found Alexander strug-

gling to his feet, blood seeping through the fingers of the hand he held to his throat, his bewildered face chalk-white.

"Treason!" they roared at him. Their swords converged on his body.

"I—I—know nothing of it," sobbed the Master, as he crumpled over the searing blades.

Gowrie himself had missed the beginning of the tragedy, for he had been outside the porter's lodge in the street, trying to find out if the King had been seen to leave or not. But as the commotion broke out behind him he hurried back, forcing his way through the group of King's men who set upon him in the gateway and charging up the Turnpike, passing his brother's body as it lay huddled by the wall.

In the study were Ramsay and a few others from James's suite. James was not there: he had shut himself up in the little turret room from which he had given the alarm, and Lennox and Mar with their followers were still crashing benches, chairs and ladders against the door from the gallery to the study beyond. But their voices were so unrecognisable in the tumult that when Gowrie rushed up from the Turnpike the King's men in the study fancied themselves attacked by Ruthvens on both sides. They panicked. Gowrie rushed at them, terrible behind his bare sword. "Where is my brother?"

"The King is dead," cried Ramsay, glaring wildly round.

Gowrie checked in horror. His sword-point dropped, and Ramsay ran him through. It was all over in a few seconds, over before Lennox and Mar, heralded by a tremendous splintering of wood and rattle of weapons, broke through into the study and seemed in danger of killing every one in it before they could be reassured

that they were King's men, not Ruthvens, and Gowrie who lay dead there, not the King.

Then Lennox and Mar called to James in the turret. The danger was over now, he might come out. There was a pause.

"Is that the voice of Mar?" said a cautious voice from the far side of the door.

"It is, sir."

"And who is with him?"

"Lennox and the rest, your Majesty."

"They have their arms in their hands and are not prisoners?"

"They are free and bearing their arms."

"There are no Ruthvens with you?"

"None alive," said Lennox grimly.

Then at last James came warily out, his big blue eyes rolling anxiously as he looked about the room. But behind the terror on his face, some other emotion flickered, barely showing itself as a sort of exaltation which none of his audience was sufficiently subtle to distinguish from fear.

"Your Majesty," said Lennox, as he knelt.

"But—how did it all come about?" said the downright Earl of Mar.

"I was set upon," said James unsteadily, a hand to his chest, clawing at the leather of his hunting jerkin. "I hardly know how I saved myself—there was Mr. Alexander—and another great grim fellow in armour in the room with him——"

Ramsay, the page, who had come first up the stair, looked startled. Had he seen a third man in the room? His attention had been all for the King: he could remember only the Master besides. Still, if the King said there had been a man in armour, no doubt the man in armour had been there. He could hardly contradict his

Majesty, when asked to testify to it, but his memory of the scene had been too blurred with haste and consternation to be at all clear. His chief memory was of the struggle between the King and the Master, and the King's voice shouting "Strike!"

"You saw him, Ramsay? A man in armour, by the window there?"

"I—er—why, yes, your Majesty. I did not see him clear, but if you say it——"

"I do say it," barked James. He turned away from the worried young man who had disposed of both his victims, and made his way to where the body of Gowrie lay. There he knelt down himself. His voice was loud and strong as he raised his hands and bowed his head over them to thank God for that "miraculous deliverance and victory," and promising with the fervour of a man driving a bargain, even with the Almighty, that his preservation should be for the completion of a greater work to His glory.

The room was very quiet: James knelt on by the body of the head of the house of Ruthven, and those round him muttered their "amens." But the wary ears of Lennox and Mar were already straining to appraise noises from outside, the deep throaty pealing of the town bell, which called the citizens to the defence of their chief family, the rattle of the drums in the streets, the mounting outcry of the armed and angry crowd. So news of the Ruthvens' death had got about already. Then they were not out of the wood yet. Yells mounted to them from the street, and James caught the echo of an old taunt of his boyhood: "Come down, thou son of Signor Davie, come down," raged the citizens of Perth.

Mar sent a hasty message to Tullibardine and his soldiers for help, thanking his stars that they were there. But even so the King's party was besieged for several



hours by citizens who threatened to tear the stones of Gowrie House down to get at them, and it was not till evening that James could be conducted secretly out by the gate which gave on to the river, rowed some distance and brought back to Falkland with a strongly armed guard.

The news had preceded him there, and the whole place was in a flutter. James had not expected Anne to take the news of Alexander's death well, but it was unseemly, to say the least of it, that she should burst into tears of horror at the sight of her husband. He was obliged to make excuses for her on account of her condition, but the exhibition convinced him that it had been high time to put the Ruthvens out of the way. It also confirmed his intention to do the business thoroughly while he was about it. The very name of Gowrie should be forgotten. He sent a party to arrest the widowed Countess, with her two youngest sons, he ordered that the sisters, Beatrice and Barbara, should be banished from Court, and he announced the confiscation of the entire Gowrie estates by the Crown.

The Countess and her boys escaped into England, the Queen went into a fine fit of hysterics at the loss of her Maids of Honour, and James found, to his astonishment, that though the common people gave him an enthusiastic welcome from the jaws of death, his own cast-iron story of the affair was actually doubted in certain quarters, notably by the extremists of the Kirk. James was indignant. His personal testimony, he considered, ought to put the matter beyond question. But that testimony, as certain ministers actually had the insolence to point out, depended on his unsupported word. The chief actors on the Gowrie side were conveniently dead: the underlings admittedly knew nothing. Mar and Lennox could only testify that the Master had come early to Falkland (the

fact that James had summoned him did not emerge) and had ridden to the hunt with the King. James had told them in confidence of the pot of gold story which was taking him to Perth, and it had sounded an uncommonly trumped-up tale too. So they, at least, had gone to Gowrie House with their swords loose in their sheaths. So far, so good. The skill with which James had suggested these suspicions was known to James alone.

James's own story was given at length and the greatest detail. The Master had led him into the study, locked the door at their back, and cried that he now meant to be avenged for his father's death. He had snatched a dagger from the "great grim man in armour" who had been standing there to help him, and pointed it at the King's throat. Asked to identify the man in armour, or to exhibit the dagger, James had some difficulty. There had been twenty or thirty daggers in the room since, and nobody had seen the man in armour except himself, or perhaps Ramsay, who was now by no means certain of anything he had seen or done.

In that case, the sceptical pointed out, the man in armour had very remarkably disappeared into thin air, since the Turnpike was occupied with the men hurrying up it to rescue the King, and the way out by the gallery barred by the locked door against which Mar and Lennox were pounding already. Eventually the matter was shelved, to be investigated at leisure. Meanwhile the Ruthven version of the affair was officially suppressed, and James ordered that the 5th of August was to be set apart each year for national thanksgiving for the preservation of the King.

It was over the matter of thanksgiving that James encountered his only considerable difficulty. The ministers, still smarting from their own defeat, were not prepared to accept James's story. They did not actually venture

to suggest that the King was lying, that Ramsay, the King's page, had been bribed to commit perjury. But they pointed out discontentedly that whether Ramsay had perjured himself or not he had been well rewarded with a barony and a good slice of the Gowrie estates.

Five ministers went so far as to refuse to give thanks for the King's escape from a treasonable attempt on his life. James had these five dissenters brought to Holyroodhouse, where he interviewed them personally, going over all the evidence with a patience which suggested, at least to the ministers, that he had good reason for his anxiety to convince them. And so, partly from inherent obstinacy, partly from that integrity which characterised their kind, they refused to be convinced. But they were poor men; threats of dismissal from their parishes brought all of them but one to agree at least to lead their congregations in rejoicing at the safety of the King. One alone remained after the others had been talked round. It was Master Robert Bruce, chief minister of Edinburgh, who now stood with the corners of his mouth turned down and his hands clasped before him, as he had stood waiting for the unwelcome oil with which he had been coerced, years ago, into anointing the Queen. Perhaps some memory of that earlier surrender stiffened his resistance now. He was meek but unshakable.

James sighed. He went over all the evidence again. Master Bruce shook his head. The part played by the Master seemed to him the least likely.

"Then," said James in exasperation, "you must consider me a murderer."

"No," said Master Bruce. "You might, sir, have some secret cause."

The shrewd old man had come very near the truth. James hurried on, arguing and illustrating, till at

last Master Bruce grudgingly said that as a private individual he was satisfied with the evidence.

"You, yourself, trust it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then if you trust it, why may you not preach it to the people?"

Master Bruce waved deprecatory hands. "I can tell you that, sir," he said at last. "I give it, to be honest, only a doubtful trust. Does Bernard not tell us that to give undoubted trust to doubtful things is temerity, and to give doubtful trust to undoubted things is infirmity?"

James pounced. "But this *is* undoubted."

Master Bruce bowed his head. "Then bear with my infirmity," he said.

James could not move him. Eventually he banished him from the country, since at that ticklish time he could not afford to have any doubts spread about. The Ruthvens were gone, it was true, and the trial had been carefully arranged. But for all that it was perhaps fortunate that the attention of the country was distracted from James towards his Queen.

For news came midway through November, which set James riding hard for Dunfermline. Anne had given birth to a son in the Palace she was so proud of, and neither she nor the new Prince were expected to live.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

BUT ANNE DID NOT DIE. Nor did the lamentable, wailing scrap of a new Prince, for whom fate had other plans. Charles, Duke of Albany, was hurriedly baptised at Holyrood, and with the curious tenacity of some sickly children, continued to remain only just alive, a source of continual anxiety and distraction to his parents.

James and Anne seemed to reach, after his birth, some sort of compromise, by which they agreed to continue to maintain the outward appearance of married happiness for the reassurance of their subjects. Anne had acquired a certain resignation with the delicacy left by her confinement, and James's interest had now shifted far away from her, towards his children, and his kingdom above all.

He was, on the whole, pleased with the state of Scotland. The great nobles were quiet ; a King who might at any moment have supreme power over the rich acres of England was not to be offended. The Kirk was quiet too; the King had, it seemed, beaten out its stubborn fire, though like so many fires in Scotland, it smouldered still, and was to break out in the conflagration which was to turn James's victory to his son Charles's destruction nearly half a century later. But in the meantime, James surveyed his conquests with complacence, and reminded the restless young Henry, fidgeting through his father's visits to Stirling, of the truth of what he had written in the *Basilikon Doron*. Let Henry, in his turn, count it his chiefest earthly glory to excel in the divine craft of kingship, that game of chess with the country for his

board and living counters to move about it as he wished.

Knights, pawns, bishops, James had them all now, for in 1600 the first three of the new episcopal bishops had been introduced into the appalled Kirk. Its leaders had protested, even offered themselves as martyrs, but in vain. "It is this head, sir, that you would have," cried Andrew Melville. "Take it, take it, and leave us the liberties of Jesus Christ and his kingdom."

"The kingdom," said James amiably, "is mine, committed to me by God himself, and you will do it more service, Master Melville, with your head than without it. At least I hope so. But do not try too much to make me change my mind."

And Andrew Melville was obliged to submit for want of support. The Kirk stood more in need of loyalty than sacrifice, these days; for some of its lesser brethren were going astray, ignobly anxious to submit to the King for the chance of continuing their ministry. Deserted by the rank and file, the leaders of the Kirk were obliged to submit. Reluctantly they bowed their heads and cannily turned their attention to the instruction of the people in doctrine, Sabbath observance, and general morality. For if the Kirk once got the chance of fighting for its freedom again the people must know something of the freedom which it claimed. The authority of the minister over his congregation was still unquestioned and the General Assembly presently introduced regulations which would bring the people to appreciate it further. Every congregation was to come, household by household, to their own Parish kirk each week for instruction by their minister in the catechism and the grounds of religion, with periodic examination on the knottier points.

Old Andrew Haliburton grumbled that a man as

troubled with the rheumatics as he was might as well take his bed to the kirk and bide there, for what with two services on the Sabbath, another on Tuesday, and a meeting for prayer and catechism on Thursday, he seemed to spend most of his time either on the way there or coming back. But his wife said that the meetings were at least a distraction from the pains in their old bones, and there was always something going on there, even if it were only a neighbour's daughter brought to the stool of repentance or a few eident bodies scolded for coming to the kirk in plaids instead of the dark blue cloaks prescribed for respectable women. She liked the chance of getting a crack with old friends; it helped to pass the days which seemed longer now that Walter had settled down so far away in Fife and hardly came to the city from one year's end to the other. Old Andrew sighed a little at the thought of Walter farming the salty acres of East Fife when he might have been one of the great ones at Court by now. But it seemed that Walter had not wanted great things, only little ones, and perhaps wisely. At least he was happy enough round and about the busy, rambling homestead, with his children scrambling adventurously up and down the sunny doorstep and Helga singing and churning in the dairy beyond.

Walter had offered his parents a seat by his fireside for as long as they wanted it, and meant what he said too. It was his father who had refused. The old, said Andrew Haliburton, had no business to fasten themselves on the young, and his wife agreed with him. She knew that it would have been the death of the old man to move him from the house in the Lawnmarket, where he could still thumb the new fabrics and give his seasoned judgment on a bargain, and hirple up and down the cobbled High Street, pausing by the Mercat Cross to discuss the sermon and the latest goings-on.

This play-acting now. It was a pity that the Kirk had set its face against the English comedians who were going up and down the country. What harm did it do a man to get a good laugh? Maybe it was right enough to forbid some of the dancing and drinking and guising that took the young creatures up and down the streets at Hallowe'en and Candlemas and Hogmanay, wearing each other's clothes and screaming like mad things. But Andrew Haliburton wished the ministers had kept their tongues off the English comedians, and thought the Kirk well served when the King summoned the Edinburgh Kirk Session and made them revoke the act which forbade the performance of the plays in the city.

James rather fancied himself as a patron of the arts, nowadays, as befitted a man who might wake up one morning to find himself King of England, where they flourished. He had the comedians summoned to play before him at Holyroodhouse, was good enough to approve of some of their pieces, and even to suggest some improvements. He liked to pore over a bundle of greasily-thumbed prompters' scripts with pleasantly secular titles like *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Bandy-Legged Brewer* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. They made a welcome change from the laborious masques of virtue and morality which were all that the Scottish Kirk could bring themselves to tolerate. Secular comedy, as James realised, was something new and significant. He was assisting at the birth of an art.

So he watched the players inquisitively and took the trouble to point out the philosophic weaknesses in their pinchbeck presentation of life. They listened meekly enough, especially the sickly looking man with the big head who had written some of the pieces and furbished up others. Not much of an actor, their leader said, but he worked well enough for his keep and kept them



supplied with farces. James did not care for the fellow. He had a sly way of smiling behind his hand when he, the King, was good enough to give the players some helpful hints on how to say their lines, urging temperance rather than whirlwind passion. For sometimes, said James, they might as well have got the town-crier of Edinburgh to bawl them from the Mercat Cross. They made as much noise to as little purpose.

He very much enjoyed laying down the law to the comedians, and was sorry when they went, though they were quarrelsome, hard-drinking and light-fingered, and the scribbling fellow went continually about poking his nose into things which did not concern him. At Holyrood he was more likely to be listening to one of the Queen's Maids about the state of things in Denmark than waiting in the wings for his cue to prance on as a clown or an ass-headed buffoon. And there was never a piece of scandal going about the Court that he did not nose out, even the dangerous story of the King's jealousy and the Queen's silver ribbon was noted and stored carefully away. To reproduce that story might lose him his head, but he was an old hand at disguising borrowed plumes, and there was not much to recall the incident, a year or two later, in a play which he made about a Moor and a maiden and a handkerchief patterned with strawberries.

The poor burnt witches of Aberdeen and North Berwick screamed again for him, as gossips whispered in ale-houses of the sieves they sailed, the gibbets they haunted, the venom they drained, of daft Janet who sat in the cornfields and felt the ears of corn. He listened to any one who would tell him of strange things, scribbling fragmentary phrases while the other players shouted for him in vain. Queer stuff it was, said the people who had craned their necks for a glimpse of it.

“If you can look into the seeds of time

And say which grain will grow and which will  
not. . . .”

They rather thought the fellow might be a wizard himself from the positively professional interest he took in incantations and spells.

Various busy people, of course, made a point of warning the King against the players, but James would hear nothing against them. They pleased the Queen, and diverted him of an evening, more than all his dry books. His studies had no longer the power to come between him and the acute anxiety which kept him continually writing to Cecil about the Succession, or ciphering out the Englishman's wary replies. His Majesty had nothing to fear. He need only wait. Nature was taking its course. But to James that course of his godmother's interminable life seemed hardly to be endured. He was nearing forty, and had outgrown his youth long ago. Enthusiasm had shrivelled into greed, intelligence dried up into pedantry, love into avidity. He waited, his hands already shaped to clutch, his soul isolated in his kingship like a shrivelled dusty kernel in an imposing nut. Anxiety mounted with every rumour which reported the doings of Queen Elizabeth, brought news of favours conferred to this man or that, hinted at the uneasy temper of the English people as they watched the Queen's life spin slowly out.

It was a wild and anxious winter at Holyrood: it was a strange one in London. Men who knew her said that Elizabeth had aged twenty years since the execution of her too ambitious favourite Essex the spring before, and certainly, she never regained the tumultuous popularity which that incident had shaken. Reverence had begun to be tinged almost with horror. Like James, she was alone. She had outlived all her old allies: Leicester, Burleigh,

Walsingham, all were gone, and her old enemy, Philip of Spain, too. The new courtiers were not the same. They had, she fancied, sometimes a look of the circle of jackals which waits round a dying lioness, obsequious, wary, and impudent, their bright eyes aware of every flicker of declining strength. She was afraid of assassination, it seemed, and James shook his head discontentedly at the tales of so many fine tapestries which were as good as his being spoiled by the poking rapier she carried now more often than a stick. She would never have death mentioned in her presence, and a whisper of pestilence set the Court packing hastily for a move from London to one or other of the country residences, to Nonesuch, Hampton Court, or St. Mary La Bonne which overlooked London from the gentle northern slopes.

Elizabeth saw in the New Year, 1603, at Whitehall, compelling herself to be present at the usual gaieties, beating time to the rollicking music with a thin hand which would wave bravely for a little while, the torch-light striking back from its rings, then waver, and at last fall to her lap and lie there limply till she felt curious eyes upon her so that she must raise it again to snap her fingers at them.

January passed, then February, while Henry in Stirling had measles and gave it to all his companions, so that he could neither do any lessons nor see his father, whose passion for his son was not as strong as his fear of infection. So Henry, rising nine, spent an uncomfortable week and a hilarious convalescence, while baby Charles had croup, and frightened his nurses nearly out of their wits by becoming black in the face and threatening to die with every crowing breath. The women in the ante-chambers of the royal nursery sobbed with terror round the old nurse who had seen the shadow of death hovering over the cradle in the shape of a man

who seemed so strangely to carry an axe instead of a scythe.

In January Elizabeth had a cold, and moved from Whitehall to her favourite Richmond, her "warm winter-box" which she felt piteously confident would cure her once more. And at first it seemed as if it would. During February she was better, but by March the waiting pack closed in again.

Sir Robert Carey, her kinsman, visited her, decently grave, sharp-eyed, inquisitive. For once he found her without pretence. She shook her head at him, her hand held to her throat. "No, Robin, I am not well," whispered the Queen of England.

Carey was an opportunist. He was also well aware, as an official on the Scottish Border, how much store the King of Scotland set by his godmother's health. He left the interview to make arrangements for a strong horse to be unobtrusively waiting near the Palace, and for others to be held in readiness, day and night, along the road to Scotland. He saw no reason for allowing duty or affection to stand in the way of advancement, and he spent the week-end in his boots. But on Sunday the Queen was well enough to attend divine service, and Sir Robert kicked his boots into a corner and went discontentedly to bed.

On Monday the Queen was worse. She would not eat and she would not rest. She refused to take medicine, even to see her physicians, and with superstitious determination she refused to go to bed. Only when utterly exhausted by her attempt to meet death on her feet would she even consent to sit at least among cushions. Cecil, who in this extremity had lost something of his suavity, tried to speak with authority instead.

"Madam, to content the people you must go to bed."

Elizabeth turned her head slowly towards him, raised

her arched brows and spoke with all her majesty. "Little man, little man," she said, her merciless eyes scanning his stunted body and her mouth twisted into an expression of contempt, "the word *must* is not used to princes."

Cecil bowed in silence, while the Archbishop of Canterbury implored her at least to allow him to summon her physicians.

"I know my own constitution," croaked Elizabeth. "I tell you it will pass."

Hours later the Lord Admiral Howard persuaded her to take a little broth, holding the spoon carefully to her lips while the tears ran down his face. She gestured her other Councillors, that pack of jackals, away from her, and confessed her fear and weakness to the Admiral alone. "My lord," she whispered, clutching at his hand, "I am tied with a chain of iron about the neck." At last they carried her to bed, speechless.

On Wednesday afternoon the Council was summoned to the chamber where the Queen was said to be at the point of death. The old, shelved question of the Succession had now become of greater importance than Elizabeth herself.

The circle of great men stood silent round her as she lay there, grey-faced, scarcely breathing. Her eyes, in which alone life seemed to linger, were fixed on Cecil, who knelt and spoke slowly and distinctly, as if to an obstinate child.

"Madam, we humbly beg that you will for the sake of the peace of England now name to us your successor on this throne."

In the stifling bed-chamber no one moved. The ladies-in-waiting stood back against the walls to allow the members of the Privy Council access to their Queen. The only sounds were the sobs from the women and the whistling breaths with which Elizabeth tried to speak and

failed. She moistened her lips with a heavy tongue and tried again. Her eyes glared, outraged by her body's treachery, and her fingers made little plucking movements at the sheet.

"Madam," said Cecil again, "if you will make a sign with your hand when we say the name of your chosen successor it will be sufficient for us."

Elizabeth continued to glare at him, and Cecil went on hurriedly. The tension was becoming almost unbearable, even for him. "The King of France," he said, watching her closely, as he tested her intelligence with such an unwelcome suggestion. The small figure among the big pillows made no sign of even having heard.

"The King of Scotland," mouthed Cecil.

Elizabeth's right hand, weighed beyond its strength with gorgeous rings, was convulsed, shuddered, seemed to fail, and eventually rose a triumphant inch from the gold-embroidered coverlet, before it fell again for the last time, inert.

"We thank you, Madam," said Cecil quietly.

In silence the secular Councillors drew back while the Archbishop of Canterbury stepped forward to administer the last rites of the Church. It was already dark, and as the Archbishop began to pray it seemed to the horrified imagination of the waiting ladies to grow darker still. The river mist seeped inexorably through each crack and cranny, till every candle in its gilded sconce had its lambent halo, as if all the angels of God waited there for the soul which the Queen of England was so reluctant to surrender.

The Archbishop and his chaplains waited round the bed: lights from the ante-room threw the grotesque predatory shadow of Cecil across the threshold. Elizabeth seemed to lie in an exhausted sleep. Her ladies would not leave her, but dozed at their posts, their heads on cushions,

huddled on chairs or day-beds, or on stools before the fire. Outside the casements the river mist blanketed all sound; and below the dim squares of light which marked the Queen's bed-chamber Sir Robert Carey waited again, shivering in his drenched cloak.

It was at three o'clock, the ebb tide of human life, that some subtle change warned one of the Queen's attendants. She tiptoed towards the bed, then roused the others with a cry. Half-awake, reeling with fatigue and weeping with the end of the long strain, they gathered round the Queen. All but one, the sister of the man in the darkness outside, who slipped across to the casement, drawing a ring from her finger as she went.

Sir Robert's upward-tilted face was pale as that of a dead man himself as she dropped the ring silently into his waiting hands. Then through the silence of the night came presently the hoof-beats of a furiously galloping horse as Carey set off headlong for the north.

In Holyrood James waited. He had been able to settle to nothing all that week: his anticipation produced a series of tantalising possibilities: the Queen might choose another heir: she had recovered a dozen times: why should she not recover again, if only to defraud him? She might lose her reason and retain her life, become an imbecile, but remain Queen of England.

The thought tormented him. He had waited all his life for this: he could wait no longer. His whole soul seemed concentrated into that ambition which had ruled him, for which he had long ago sacrificed integrity with the death of his mother whom he might have saved. All Friday, all Saturday, he paced up and down the rooms of Holyrood, while the wind howled in the great chimneys like a chorus of damned souls. These winds had plucked on the casements of Richmond only a few hours before they shook those of Holyrood, thought James. If one

could but send messages with the speed of the wind . . . but no, that was to aspire to godhead or deviltry, that was beyond man's reach. He paced about his rooms at Holyrood, his finger-tips between his teeth, his nails bitten ragged. If this chance failed, if the Queen in her dotage named another heir, he would be beggared indeed. What shall it profit a man, they said, if he gained the whole world and lost his own soul? Well, one might not think that too bad a bargain, after all. Better at least than spending it for nothing, nothing, *nothing* in the end.

By Saturday at nightfall no news had come.

"We will hear nothing now," sighed Anne.

James whirled on her savagely. "Why not?"

"The gates of the city must be shut. You know these stupid men. They will let nothing through after dark for fear their throats will be cut."

"I have left orders for any messenger from England to be let through," snarled James.

"I expect she has recovered," said Anne placidly. "You know, James, it is astonishing how these old people hold on to life. I had an aunt once——"

"I am going to bed," said James.

"Very well," said Anne, beginning to fold up her embroidery. "In that case it would not be seemly for me to sit up. Especially as there is no chance of news to-night."

"There is every chance of news," raged James. "I am going to bed because of the perversity of fate, which will choose that moment to produce the messenger."

"Very well, James," said Anne.

"What is that?" said James suddenly.

"I heard nothing."

"I heard a noise outside."

"There is nothing that I can hear," said Anne, with



a yawn. "Really, James, if you are coming to bed I wish you would make up your mind and come. I do not care if I am Queen of England to-night or this time next week, but I can scarcely keep my eyes open. Come to bed."

"I will not come to bed," rasped James.

"Very well. Then we will stay where we are," sighed Anne, reaching for her embroidery again. "I suppose you could not sit down, James, and read a book?"

James continued to stamp to and fro without answering her. "These witches," he said, as he turned at the far end of the room and came pacing back, "if we had not burnt the lot of them they might have read the future for us and saved this waiting. Agnes Sampson now—but they burnt her, of course—a pity, a pity. She could have shown me the future, no doubt, as faithfully as the past."

"Better not, James," said Anne.

Better not indeed. Better that James should not know this for the peak moment on which his life turned, know that with the kingdom which he grasped he grasped also the death and downfall of his house. Drumming on the casement of Holyrood he could see only the rain-flogged darkness of the northern winter's night which cradled the unknown future; that future which seemed so glorious, which held so much desolation: Raleigh fretting his heart out in the Tower; Henry, his son, estranged from him and dying in his teens; his daughter's marriage overseas; the future which was to turn him, the divinely anointed King, into a driveller, at the mercy of his favourites and his second son, his baby Charles. And further still, the scaffold which was not yet built, but the first planks of which he himself had prepared for Charles the Martyr when he became James the conqueror of the Kirk.

But only the winds roared at him to-night; only his heartbeats echoed the faint and furious thunder of approaching hooves.

"What's that?"

"What?"

"A horse—can't you hear it? It has come, I tell you—it has come."

Anne let her embroidery slide to the floor. James was standing rigid, his fists clenched, stammering, "It is the messenger . . . why will they not send him up? . . . I—I—gave orders that he was to be sent up immediately . . . without ceremony . . . Lord, what can they be *doing* with him below . . . ?"

The door was flung violently open, and a man staggered in, his face ghost-white where it was not daubed with dirt or caked with blood. He reeled across the room and knelt before the King. His breath came harsh on James's hand. His lips were dry and cracked as he tried to speak. "Your Majesty . . . by the Grace of God . . . England, Scotland. . . ."

"You have the ring?" said James.

"It is here."

James fitted it on his finger. His face was colourless, exalted. He did not turn to Anne, and she dared not speak to him, for in that instant he seemed oblivious of any other presence in the room, in the world, perhaps.

"Mine . . ." he said in a toneless voice. "The kingdom . . . the power. . . ."

"Hush James, that's blasphemy," whispered Anne.

But James had forgotten her, forgotten the kneeling, expectant messenger, forgotten everything but the ring which was too big for his finger. Still murmuring, he had clasped the fingers of his other hand round it as if within them he held the core of his being, the justification of his existence. His lips were moving, his feet were

planted astride, and he rocked slightly as he stood. He was not yet forty, Anne thought as she looked at him, and yet, in this moment of triumph he looked so old . . . so old. Why did he look so old? Anne crossed herself in horror.

"The power . . . and the glory," whispered James.

LONDON.—June, 1935-September, 1936.

THE END

